



# OVERLORD

Volume 7: The Invaders of the Large Tomb

## 

*Kugane Maruyama* | Illustration by so-bin

Contents

# 

Cover

Inserts

Title Page

Prologue

Chapter 1: Invitation to Death

Chapter 2: Butterflies Caught in a Spider’s Web

Chapter 3: The Great Tomb

Intermission

Chapter 4: A Handful of Hope

Epilogue

Character Profiles

Afterword

Information

Prologue

Prologue

# 

On the lowest floor of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick, in the heart

of the Tenth Floor, the air of the Throne Room — which was hung with 40 flags

— was filled with a quiet ardor.

The silent rows of vassals bowed deeply toward the throne to display their

loyalty.

Their ranks were packed with inhuman shapes. The Floor Guardians aside, all

the NPCs which had been hand-crafted by the 41 Supreme Beings and the direct

vassals of the Floor Guardians were gathered in this place. There were easily

over 200 of them here, and this was the first time so many had been gathered in

this place since their arrival in this new world.

However, there was a great difference between this occasion and the previous

one. The vassals gathered here were not the usual faces, but they were all high-

leveled, powerful entities. On average each of them was above level 80.

Shalltear Bloodfallen — Guardian of the First through Third Floors — was

typically attended by her Vampire Brides. Today, however, she was accompanied

by the highest-level undead beings which had been bestowed upon her. In

addition, even Mare — one of the Sixth Floor’s Guardians — had brought out

the two Dragons which were directly subordinated to himself and Aura, and

which had never left his floor before. These Dragons could only be obtained from

the cash gacha — at an extremely low drop rate, no less — and they were close

to level 90.

Among these carefully selected vassals, one group stood apart from the rest.

They were a group of undead who were a cut below the other entities present.

They were level 40 at the highest, and numbered about 100 strong. They were

formed up in separate ranks from the 200 entities mentioned earlier.

These undead should have taken up places at the rear of this sacred domain

upon being summoned here, behind the ranks of the other vassals. Yet they were

formed up into files, and the entities at their head occupied positions that were

even closer to the throne — proximity to the throne being an indication of status

— than even the Floor Guardians.

There was a perfectly reasonable explanation for this otherwise unreasonable

treatment.

That was because these undead were the personal creations of the ruler of the

Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick, Ainz Ooal Gown. They could not be

slighted.

Everyone present here was Ainz’s subordinate, and nobody would doubt their

absolute loyalty to the guild Ainz Ooal Gown. There was also a clear hierarchy

among them. Naturally, the highest-placed ones were the NPCs who had been

personally created by the Supreme Beings, and among them, the Floor

Guardians who had been granted weighty responsibilities were at the apex of

that group.

Behind the NPCs were naturally spawned (POP) monsters, or monsters

summoned through *Yggdrasil’s* mercenary system — the vassals. Their status

was determined by their power and their assigned duties, but they were all

formed up into ranks, without regard for their floors of origin.

In that case, where should the undead created by Ainz be placed?

This question had troubled the Guardian Overseer Albedo. She did not know

whether or not to accord them the same status as the NPCs.

When she asked Ainz, he had laughed and declared that it would be fine to put

them in the lowest position.

Ainz’s ability to create undead had a limited number of uses in a day, but there

was no monetary cost needed to use it. In comparison, the high-level vassals

which the Guardians had brought along were beings created through *Yggdrasil’s*

mercenary system and required expenditures of in-game currency or real

money. The former could be created again for free if they were destroyed, but

the money spent on the latter would be wasted if they died. Therefore, to Ainz,

the undead he created — being free of charge, even if they required corpses to

be made — were cheaper than the beings that were born through the use of

money.

Of course, that was Ainz’s point of view, and not that of his loyal subordinates.

Albedo was moved to tears after hearing her magnanimous master’s decision,

but she could not answer, “I understand.” She agonized over the problem for

half a day, and then finally decided to break with tradition by forming the undead

into files, thus glossing over that problem.

Seated upon the throne, the highest position within this room, Ainz looked

down upon his vassals — which Albedo had spent so much effort on organizing

— and spoke unto them as though he was bestowing a revelation. No, to those

who swore fealty to him, Ainz’s words were nothing less than the will of the gods

made manifest.

# 

●

# 

“To begin with, thank you all for your long hours of information-gathering.

Sebas, Solution, you have done well.”

Ainz looked down upon the two people bowing before him, and nodded in

satisfaction. However, the problem was what came next. It was too difficult for

a mere commoner to imitate the behavior of a ruler, and Ainz felt himself being

crushed under the pressure. He saw his countless subordinates before him.

Their eyes glowed with respect and adoration.

His supposedly non-existent stomach ached with pain, and his heart — which

should have been similarly absent — throbbed within his chest.

However, that only lasted for a moment. The intense desire to flee this place

with all his might was suppressed by the emotional override which was a special

feature of his body.

Ainz finally felt like he could play the role of a proper ruler, and he ordered:

“The two of you, come before me.”

The summoned pair rose as one. They moved in perfect unison to the steps

before the throne, as though they had rehearsed this before. Then they halted

before Albedo, who stood in front of and to the side of Ainz.

The two of them then knelt once more, with neatly coordinated motions.

“Raise your heads. For your exemplary performance, I shall grant you a

reward.”

Ainz looked to Sebas.

“Sebas, while you pleaded for mercy on Tsuare’s behalf, I extended her my

protection in order to repay a debt. It has nothing to do with your job

performance, so I will grant you whatever you desire. Come, tell me what you

want.”

Praising one’s subordinates before an audience would spur others to work

harder. That was probably why department awards and the like were given

before all the workers. When one’s subordinates worked with passion in the

hopes of being similarly praised, it would improve the organization’s

performance. Thus, Ainz had made use of his working experience and gathered

many of his subordinates to the Throne Room for precisely this purpose.

However, doing so also carried a great risk with it. Ainz had to act like a proper

master before his many subordinates, by displaying his charm as a ruler

(charisma). This was an arduous task for a mere salaryman. However, he was the

final remaining member of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick, so he had

to overcome this trial.

*I need to repay the NPCs’ loyalty.*

As this iron determination grew in Ainz’s heart, Sebas’ mustache quivered.

“Devoting this body to serve you is all the rewar—”

*Honestly, they really are loyal subordinates. But at the same time, it puts a lot of*

*pressure on me…*

“—Enough. It is a master’s responsibility to reward good performance from

his subordinates. I would have you know that at times, a lack of desire from one’s

subordinates sometimes displeases their master.”

“Yes! Please forgive your humble servant! That being the case…”

Sebas paused to think for a few seconds, and then said:

“I would like to receive clothing and daily necessities for the use of Tsuare,

the human which you have so graciously placed under me, Ainz-sama.”

“…I can give you the clothing and so on from my personal inventory.”

In *Yggdrasil,* once one missed the chance to acquire limited-availability items

or Player-made clothing, the chances of being able to obtain them again in the

future were very low. Therefore, he had bought any and all outfits that had

caught his eye without hesitation. Ainz was not the only one who had done so —

all of his friends had the same tendencies. No, in all likelihood, just about any

Player would do that.

Peroroncino, the guild member who had created Shalltear, had something to

say about this sort of tendency: “It’s like porn that you like, you just save it right

away and worry about using it later.” After that, he added: “Although, I have no

idea which folder they’re saved in.”

In truth, he was correct. Ainz had purchased a vast quantity of outfits, both

male and female, but he had only stored it and never used it. Since all they did

was take up space in his wardrobe, it would be wiser to make use of them.

Ainz thought of the clothing he had bought from all over the place. *Yggdrasil’s*

clothing was largely overwrought in design, but there ought to be something

suitable for Tsuare.

“No, there is no need to trouble you to do that, Ainz-sama. Tsuare has enjoyed

your largesse until now; it would be too much to ask for more.”

“Is that so… alright, then. However, as for the clothes…”

This was a tricky problem for Ainz, who had never bought ladies’ clothes

before. What if they felt he was tasteless? He might end up torpedoing the

collective opinion which the ladies of Nazarick held of him.

“May I enlist Narberal for this task? I could not possibly trouble you, the ruler

of Nazarick, with such a trivial matter, Ainz-sama.”

Sebas had probably not sensed Ainz’s unease, but his suggestion had been a

great help to Ainz.

“…Narberal, do you mind?”

Upon hearing Ainz’s voice, one of the motionless NPCs beneath him bowed

her head deeply.

“Very well, Sebas. I will let Narberal handle that task. Or…”

Ainz smiled thinly. Of course, his face did not move; it was only implied.

“You may also take Tsuare shopping. Consider it a date of sorts.”

Ainz had already heard about things between Sebas and Tsuare from the Head

Maid. While a physical relationship had not developed yet, Demiurge had said

that it was only a matter of time.

*Speaking of which, why did Demiurge say that a physical relationship between Sebas*

*and Tsuare was a good thing? Well, maybe he was wishing his colleague all the best in*

*his pursuit of love. If that’s the case, then the two of them would actually be getting*

*along surprisingly well. The mood in the air was a bit stiff when we were in the Royal*

*Capital, but maybe that was just due to the circumstances. Still, that’s a relief; it’s not*

*like I want to see them fighting all day…*

The reason why the guild members Touch Me and Ulbert were at loggerheads

sprang from a reason external to *Yggdrasil.* In fact, it was because of Ulbert’s

real-life jealousy.

*I remember their relationship was strained ever since that argument… maybe that*

*was the start of everything.*

Ainz felt as though he was looking out upon a vast expanse of wasteland, and

he felt that he understood now. Just then, Sebas’ surprised voice cleared away

the thoughts in his mind.

“May, May I do so? Then, I would like to go with Tsuare.”

*—It’s not like I’m bullying this sweet couple because I’m a bachelor.*

If they had their date in E-Rantel, then he would just put on his Mask of

Jealousy and tail them. As Ainz thought about pointless things like that, he

raised his chin, indicating that the other kneeling person should speak.

“It is fine. Then, Solution. Speak your desires.”

“…I would like several humans, live ones, if possible. Ideally, they would be

pure human beings.”

Ainz considered the humans he had captured. Many of the surviving humans

were associated with Eight Fingers, the group which had displeased Ainz.

According to the reports, everyone useful had been tortured and mentally

broken. After that were the ones whom his imprisoned servants had flouted the

rules to protect.

*Those won’t do. After all, Pestonya and Nigredo were willing to defy my orders to*

*protect them.*

“I permit this. I shall give you several live humans. However, I cannot

guarantee their purity. Forgive me for not being able to completely fulfill your

request.”

“Please do not say that! Your servant did not deserve pure human beings in

the first place! I am eternally grateful to be granted live humans!”

Ainz regarded Solution, who had bowed her head deeply, and nodded in a way

which he believed best suited a ruler.

“…Is that so. Thank you. Then, you may step back. Next is Entoma. Come

before me.”

As the two of them fell back, Entoma took their place on her knees before

Ainz.

“Now then, Entoma.”

“YeS!”

Ainz could not help but smile bitterly at her garbled voice.

“It seems your voice has not yet recovered.”

The Lip Bugs which Entoma equipped did not naturally occur in *Yggdrasil,* but

that did not mean they did not exist. There were several monsters summoned

through *Yggdrasil* currency in her room, and she could use them to restore her

voice at any time. There was only one reason she had not done so — a personal

grudge.

“DoeS mY VOiCe diSPleAsE yOu? I SHalL fiX It aT onCe!”

“Not at all. I do not dislike your current voice.”

“ThANk yOu, AInZ-SAmA!”

“Now then. You have given much of yourself and even sacrificed your voice.

However, your efforts are somewhat insufficient to qualify you for a reward.

While I may not be able to grant it like I did for the other two, tell me your

desires anyway.”

Ainz felt that handing rewards out willy-nilly was not generosity, but a lack of

consideration. Anything that was too readily available would lose its value.

From that point of view, Entoma’s efforts had not reached the standards

which Ainz had set for her to earn out a reward. That said, she had been severely

injured in the line of duty and not acknowledging that would be a pity.

*I believe they call this a Purple Heart? I’m not too familiar with military things. If*

*he were here, he could have taught me more about this.*

Ainz recalled a guild member who had been known as a military otaku.

“TheN… AINz-sAMa. If A chANCe tO KilL thAT WreTCH cOMeS uP, PLeaSE

SEnD Me. I wiSH To STeAL HeR VOIcE.”

Ainz knew that she was referring to that suspicious girl in a mask called

Evileye, and so he gave his consent.

“I understand. I will call upon you when the time comes. You may leave,

Entoma.”

He watched her return to her previous position.

“Then, let us move on to the next topic.”

Naturally, nobody objected. However, Ainz could not find happiness in this

development.

They considered Ainz to be their supreme overlord; if he said so, white would

become black and so on. That was why they were silent, and not because he had

chosen the correct course of action.

It looks like I need to install a few auditing and other agencies.

The first thing he ought to set up was a department responsible for handing

out rewards. The problem with that was the NPC and vassals all believed that

serving Ainz was a natural state of affairs and did not require any sort of reward.

In addition, the criteria for being rewarded were very vague and essentially

determined by Ainz, which was another problem.

*If we’re going to operate as a group, I’ll need to lay down some concrete guidelines*

*in this field… it’s all my fault for leaving the group’s management to Albedo and*

*running from my responsibilities, now it’s come to bite me in the ass. Still, this is beyond*

*the capabilities of a regular person. Almost none of my life experiences have been*

*applicable so far.*

Ainz (Suzuki Satoru) had been a mere wage slave in the past, and the strain of

leadership was giving him headaches. However, he struggled to rein it in. He

could fret about these things when he was alone in his room and could roll

around on his scented bed.

“I will be deciding the direction Nazarick will be taking in the future.

Demiurge, to me.”

The finest mind of Nazarick ascended the stairs, taking his place opposite

Albedo.

“Guardian Overseer of Nazarick, Albedo. The keenest intellect of Nazarick,

Demiurge. Our original plan is now more than half-complete. I order you to

explain our action plan for the future. If anyone has any suggestions, you may

raise your hands and speak.”

Ainz’s first priority was Nazarick’s continued survival. No, in the worst-case

scenario — even if he lost the place known as Nazarick — it would be enough

for him to protect the NPCs, the children of his former friends. He could create

a shelter and use other methods to solve that problem.

The second was to spread the name of Ainz Ooal Gown to the entire world.

That was because Ainz considered that if his friends were in this world, they

might come to find him. Perhaps this objective could be pushed back in terms of

priority.

The third was to strengthen Nazarick. Perhaps he ought to move that up in

importance.

Indeed, the more he understood this world, the more he felt that Nazarick

was an impregnable fortress, while Ainz Ooal Gown felt like the strongest

organization within it. However, someone had been able to mind-control

Shalltear, albeit with the use of a World Class Item, so arrogance and pride

would be very dangerous. In particular, since World Class Items existed in this

world, it would be best to assume that other guilds existed here, lest they be

ambushed. Thus, they had to take action to increase Nazarick’s strength.

Currently, they had enlisted the Lizardmen and Ainz had produced undead

beings, but they needed to pursue strength more voraciously.

His fourth priority was to gather information. That had originally been his

primary concern, but since it had already been partially completed, he had

lowered its priority.

This was Ainz’s thought process. However, it was ultimately the product of

Ainz, the commoner. There might be a hole in it somewhere, or he might not

have analyzed the information well enough before using it as a foundation.

Because of that. Ainz had called upon a pair of keen intellects. If all he needed

was their wisdom, then all he had to do was discuss the matter with them

directly. There was no need to risk letting everyone know that his head was

empty by putting on a big show to talk about this problem.

However, doing so would be a mistake.

As their master, he had to put on this show in order to play the role in which

the NPCs envisioned him — though he felt it was more of a delusion. He had to

play the role of Ainz Ooal Gown, an incomparable being and a thinker of

fathomless depths, and do so upon a grand stage.

“The two of you will explain clearly to everyone present. These are the elite

personnel selected by the various Guardians. Let them hear about our future

direction and do not leave out any details.”

Indeed, Ainz had been forced to employ this stratagem. It was like telling

them to “explain to the other Guardians” on a larger scale. His plan was to use

the excuse that someone or everyone did not understand, then pretend he knew

and listen to the explanation.

“Then, Demiurge. You will clearly explain what we now know to those who do

not understand the details. In any event, start by telling them the actions

Nazarick has taken in the Kingdom.”

“Understood.”

Demiurge then began to address the NPCs beneath him.

This was what Ainz had been waiting for. At that time, Ainz had agreed with

it. He had felt the wise Demiurge could do no wrong, but after thinking further

upon the matter he felt that Demiurge had ended up doing unnecessary things.

“On the Kingdom’s side, we have successfully subdued the members of the

criminal syndicate’s top leadership with the aid of Mare, Neuronist and

Kyouhukou. All we need to do from now on is slowly permeate into them until

we are in a position to rule the Kingdom’s underworld.”

“…Mm?”

Ainz quietly made his doubts audible. Why did they have to take over the

Kingdom’s crime syndicate? It seemed somewhat different from the simple

explanation he had heard back then. A reasonable hypothesis for that would be

in order to harvest money over the long term, or to easily obtain information.

Just as Ainz was thinking, Demiurge closed his mouth and looked back, staring

at him. While giving thanks that his body did not sweat, he asked:

“What’s wrong, Demiurge? Is something the matter?”

“No, I simply thought I heard you say something, Ainz-sama.”

“Oh, my apologies. I was simply indicating my agreement. It would seem you

misunderstood me. Alright, carry on, then. Tell everyone the significance of

taking over the Kingdom’s criminal organization.”

“Yes. Then, gentlemen. Taking over the syndicate is the foundation for

achieving Ainz-sama’s objective; that is to say world domination. I trust nobody

is stupid enough to not know that.”

Ainz glanced down at everyone’s face. They all looked like they understood,

without exception.

Ainz was the only one who did not understand.

“…World domination?”

What the hell was that? When had things ended up like that? However, he

could not ask about it.

This was the greatest exercise of Ainz’s intellect in his entire life. He spent

several seconds reflecting and searching himself.

It had been far too unexpected, too difficult to accept. How had it ended up

like this? All he had wanted was to keep a low profile, avoid making enemies,

improve his reputation, and then find a way to communicate with his friends

from the past who might be in this world. Those cute little wishes were all he

had wanted.

However, right now—

*World conquest?! How did things turn out this way?!*

Ainz dearly wanted to reject those words but he lacked the courage to do so.

It was not just the NPCs but every single vassal which had that look of

understanding on their faces, as though the words “But of course” were written

there. It was evident at a glance that this was common knowledge, and that it

had been engraved into their hearts. Ainz felt something like a hot wind blowing

in the area around the throne.

Ainz Ooal Gown was the highest ruler of Nazarick, a Supreme Being. Now that

he had become an object of worship, what would happen if he personally

destroyed this image?

For all he knew, he might end up like an idol caught in some scandal by the

paparazzi. While it was sad for an idol to lose fans and for their sales figures to

decline, Ainz had the feeling that a more tragic fate than that would be waiting

for him.

*It seems too much has been invested in this scheme for me to call it off…*

Still, when he thought calmly about it, world domination was not a bad idea.

Of course, it would not be as simple as it was in games. To a plebeian like Ainz,

this large-scale plan was too vague for him to understand. However, he could

understand that this was a perfect means for him to build his reputation —

although it might end up being infamy instead.

The problem now was what his friends would think if they knew about this.

At that point, all he could do was apologize for his inability to manage Nazarick

well.

*Besides, we might be able to deal with the unknown enemy who brainwashed*

*Shalltear. That ought to work as an excuse, right? They’ll forgive me for that… right?*

Having steeled himself, Ainz magnanimously nodded to Demiurge, who

seemed to be waiting for praise.

“So… you still remembered.”

“Of course. I, Demiurge, have committed every word you have spoken to

memory, Ainz-sama.”

“Is that so… I did bring it up then, did I not?”

“Indeed.”

“…From that time, then?

“Indeed.”

“That time… I see. This pleases me, Demiurge…”

“Thank you, Ainz-sama.”

“However, world domination is quite difficult.”

“It is as you say, Ainz-sama.”

“Then… what do you think we should do?”

Ainz wanted to praise his voice for not trembling.

“I propose that Nazarick ought to take its place upon the global stage, as part

of our overall direction for the future. Since the entities who controlled Shalltear

are acting clandestinely, it may cause problems for us even if we remain hidden.”

“…Indeed.”

Was that really the case? Ainz felt it would be better to remain hidden. He had

no idea how Demiurge had reached that conclusion.

“I concur, Ainz-sama. If we make ourselves known to the world, we can deal

with problems in an aboveboard manner. We will not need to send small

amounts of personnel to conduct secret investigations.”

“Ah, I see.”

Enlightenment dawned suddenly on Ainz as he heard Albedo’s explanation.

The idea of not having to hunt for a needle in a haystack and being able to

move as boldly as they pleased was very attractive.

“So that is why we are to rule the Kingdom from the shadows and achieve

legitimacy for Nazarick by various ways and means, am I correct? However, I

cannot agree with the idea of allowing the land which Ainz-sama rules to become

part of any other country.”

Demiurge shook his head at Albedo’s question.

“Of course, Albedo. I would not be able to tolerate it either. In addition, after

perusing and contemplating our information on the Kingdom, I have come to

the conclusion that the Kingdom — as it stands now — is not attractive to us in

the least, one person aside. The same applies to all the other nations. I feel that

having our organization work for any other country would be a foolish course of

action.”

“And why is that?”

“When we must serve a nation, we will be limited in the actions that we can

take. If the people who controlled Shalltear turn out to be an organization, and

we are beholden to a certain country, we might be unable to respond promptly

if problems arise. Therefore… Ainz-sama.”

Demiurge stared at Ainz, and solemnly delivered his proposal.

“I propose we found a nation known as the Great Underground Tomb of

Nazarick.”



# Chapter 1 Invitation to Death

Chapter 1 | Invitation to Death

## 

## 

## 

## 

# 

# *1*

# 

# 

# 

Arwintar, the Imperial Capital, lay in the western region of the Baharuth

Empire. At its center was the Imperial Palace that was the residence of the man

known as the “Bloody Emperor” — Jircniv Rune Farlord El-Nix. It was

surrounded by universities, the Imperial Magical Academy and all manner of

government buildings which radiated out from it, and it could be considered the

heart of the Empire.

While its population was lower than that of the Royal Capital of the Re-Estize

Kingdom, it was larger in scope than the Royal Capital. In addition, several years

of reform meant that the Empire was currently in the middle of its greatest

boom in history, with non-stop innovation and a steady stream of resources and

human talents coming in. The old was being torn down to make way for a

promising future, and the faces of the residents were bright.

Ainz and Narberal walked through the heated, bustling city streets.

Under normal circumstances, Ainz would be gawking at everything as he

walked, like a country bumpkin fresh from the farm. At the same time, he would

have been deeply moved by how different this place was from the Kingdom.

However, those emotions were almost absent in Ainz.

The state of his heart was reflected in his actions, and his troubled steps.

What ruled him now was the feeling of unhappiness.

Coming to the Empire had been part of Demiurge’s plan, and the more he

thought about it, the more his eyebrows — illusory as they were — knotted

together.

The concept of “forbearance” was completely unnecessary for Ainz Ooal

Gown, the supreme ruler of Nazarick. Neither did he need to suppress his

feelings of frustration. Ainz’s word was law, and as a leader, all he had to do was

speak and black would become as white. By right, there was nothing which would

not go as he wished.

That being the case, why had things ended up like this? That was because he

wanted to reject Demiurge’s proposal, but he could not, for various reasons.

The objective of the plan — demonstrate the power of Nazarick — was simple

enough to understand, and its effects would show themselves immediately. That

said, Ainz disliked it, because he felt that doing so would bring shame upon the

handmade creations of his friends.

It was quite unsightly to reject an excellent plan based on personal feelings

alone, and he did not want the others to feel that he was an uncharitable person

in his role as supreme leader. Besides, he had no other ideas to serve as an

alternative.

Objecting to someone’s proposals with nothing else to replace them was

essentially picking a fight with the other party. It was not Ainz’s status as a ruler

but his experiences as a salaryman which told him this.

Ainz began muttering the words he had used to talk himself down several

times already.

*I need to be calm. I need to cool my head. I need to be rational. If forced to choose*

*between reason and emotion, a superior ought to select reason. The type who acts on*

*their emotions might be able to reap great rewards if they channel all their energies into*

*their work, but for the most part it never ends well for them. Besides, it’s already—*

“—The die has been cast?”

Ainz had no lungs, but he still took a deep breath, and then exhaled.

The surrounding citizens looked in puzzlement at this warrior who was

suddenly sucking in and expelling the air as he walked, but they did not seem to

mind.

His imposing, heroic build often drew the stares of passers-by. In particular,

it was even more common for others to look at him after he had been hailed as

a hero. Therefore, he paid no heed to the gazes of others unless he was putting

on a show, riding Hamsuke, or some other special circumstance came up.

After repeating that cycle a few times, only a little bit of annoyance remained

within him. That was when he noticed Narberal, who was trailing behind him.

“Forgive me, I seem to have been walking a little too fast.”

Ainz was a man, and the way he took large strides in armor was completely

different from the way which the feminine Narberal moved in her robe. After

considering her physical attributes, she was probably not having too much

difficulty, but as a man, he had to apologize for walking ahead while only

thinking of himself.

“Not at all, it is fine.”

“Is that so…”

Was that her answer as a servant, or did she really not mind? Ainz had no idea,

so all he could do was shorten his stride while looking for something to talk

about.

He felt uncomfortable about the prickly air around him just now, and he

racked his brains for some way to change the mood. However, he could not think

of a suitable topic.

Businessmen often used trivial matters like the weather and so on to get a

conversation going. Discussing sports was not a bad idea either, but that

required prior knowledge about which team the other party supported.

As Ainz pondered how to initiate the conversation, he suddenly went “tch” in

his heart.

*Why am I walking on eggshells around Narberal, my own subordinate? This is a*

*rare opportunity for me to roleplay how a master should talk to his servant. That said,*

*what should a ruler — or perhaps, an absolute being — talk to his subordinates about?*

Ainz recalled his conversations with his bosses in daily life. Would those be

appropriate? Ainz was confused. He was the highest authority within the Great

Underground Tomb of Nazarick, not the director of an enterprise. Strictly

speaking, he was closer to a company’s president.

*No, president’s not quite right… that said, what would the King of the Kingdom say*

*to Gazef Stronoff? If only I could use that as a reference…*

That said, there was no point thinking about that now. Going on in silence

like this made the mood too grim. Ainz decided to throw caution to the wind and

say the first thing which came to mind.

“…Nabe… what do you think of this voice of mine?”

Ainz tapped his vocal cords with his index finger — or to be precise, the place

where his vocal cords should have been. He used a gauntleted hand to press on

his throat. He should have felt nothing through the metal, but there was a

sensation of squishiness instead. There was also a strangely out-of-place

moistness there.

“I pray you will forgive my frankness, but I do not quite like that voice. It is

not because it sounds strange, but because I find your usual voice to be quite

marvelous, Momon-sa—n. I understand that you have reasons which prevent

you from doing so, but I cannot help but wish you would resume using your

normal voice, Momon-san.”

“Is that so. I think this voice has a magnetic quality to it, and sounds quite

good… Neuronist selected it from among those of 50 people, so I feel it has a

certain charm which cannot be put into words.”

Ainz suddenly recalled what his own voice sounded like in a recording, and

groaned quietly. However, his mood immediately re-stabilized.

“Is that so? I prefer your normal voice, Momon-san.”

“Thank you, Nabe. However, now that I think about it, I did not expect that I

could make use of this…”

There was no telling if Ainz was speaking from the heart or merely rattling off

pleasantries. As he thought, he poked his throat once more. He could feel the

lifeform stuck there — a Lip Bug — shifting around. Perhaps it might be ticklish

if he were human.

*Did I just not know about it, or was it added in a later update? I can’t say for sure*

*that not knowing about this won’t inconvenience me. It’s not just my knowledge of this*

*world which I need to check, but my own knowledge of* Yggdrasil *as well. How*

*troublesome.*

The game company wanted *Yggdrasil’s* Players to be able to enjoy the feeling

of exploring the unknown. They wanted their Players to play around and

experiment with all sorts of things, so the developers produced a staggering

amount of game content, and included systems that could fine-tune that data.

Thus, the unknown stretched out before the Players.

They did not provide any information about the game world’s map, and they

were also inconsiderate enough not to supply any news about the game’s

dungeons and things such as ore mining, food preparation or the raising of

magical beasts. In a world like this, one had to investigate and discover things

on one’s own. In fact, even the items that one could and could not use could only

be felt out through repeated trial and error on the Player’s part.

There were walkthrough sites and news sites, but those sites only hosted a

compilation of publicly known information or very untrustworthy rumors.

*Yggdrasil* was a game of exploring the unknown. Thus, any information one

uncovered would be very valuable. There was no merit in publishing this

valuable information for any stranger to view free of charge.

Ultimately, one could only rely on the information that one’s guild had

uncovered, or information traded from a reliable guild. Everything else was

useless and worthless news.

There had even been a period of time when people had left suspicious posts

on message boards along the lines of “I’m leaving my guild, so I’m going to reveal

all my guild’s secrets now.”

*Well… some of that information had been accurate.*

# 

●

# 

There had once been a guild called Three Burning Eyes.

It was a guild formed by the master of a website who ran a paid-membership

information site, and they often practiced the bad habit of sending spies into

high-level guilds to steal their information. However, the developers did not

consider this a “bad habit.” They tacitly agreed that this was a valid means of

gaining information. However, that did nothing to mollify the parties who had

their information stolen.

Those high-level guilds were utterly furious, so they formed an alliance and

attacked Three Burning Eyes. The alliance stationed people at the respawn

points within the temples of the city containing the guild’s home base, then

began PKing the guild’s members. They then proceeded to repeatedly PK the

guild members right after they respawned. Eventually, Three Burning Eyes

collapsed and the guild members scattered to the winds.

In the end, they published all their information for free onto the web. That

had been a nostalgic memory.

*Well, there were no spies in Ainz Ooal Gown… but if that incident had not happened,*

*perhaps we might have had more members.*

That incident had caused Ainz Ooal Gown to stop recruiting. With only 41

members, they were the least populous of the high-ranked guilds.

Perhaps there might have been highly reliable websites in the last days of

*Yggdrasil.* However, Ainz had only browsed those sites during the golden age of

Ainz Ooal Gown, when they had been in their full glory. At that time, there had

been precious little useful information on those sites.

*My knowledge might have stagnated there. Granted, I did pay attention to the*

*developer updates… there must surely be other* Yggdrasil *Players in this world other*

*than myself. I need to consider the danger of losing to them in terms of knowledge.*

After bringing Eight Fingers under his banner, Ainz had learned much about

the region surrounding Nazarick. That included a great deal of information

about the Kingdom and the Empire, which was currently being put to good use.

However, there was very little information about the Holy Kingdom, the

Theocracy, and the Council State, so he would have to carefully gather

information on those places in the future.

“Good grief, the more I think about it, the more worried I get. I wish I had a

more cheerful topic to think about instead.”

Ainz paused here, and then he casually glanced around.

“Speaking of which, the Empire really is quite lively.”

“Is that so? It feels about the same as E-Rantel to me.”

After hearing Narberal’s words, Ainz looked around once more.

“The streets are filled with life and the people’s eyes are gleaming. There is a

certain ambience in the air, one which belongs to people who believe their lives

are going to get better.”

“As expected of Momon-san,” Narberal said from a small distance behind him.

However, Ainz felt embarrassed by his own words and did not answer her. That

was simply an impression he had gotten, and he was not confident in the

accuracy of his assessment.

*Don’t tell me I was infected by Pandora’s Actor… “ambience,” I can’t believe I could*

*say something as pretentious as that without getting embarrassed. Did I think I was a*

*poet or something?!*

In the Royal Capital, he had needed to act like a hero to some extent, so Ainz

had played the role of one. It would seem he had not fully gotten out of the part

yet.

The face under the closed helm turned red from mild embarrassment —

although a skeletal face could not blush — and just then Ainz saw the inn which

Fluder had told him about before his eyes.

This was the highest-grade inn in the Imperial Capital, and even from a

distance, one could tell it was more luxurious than E-Rantel’s finest inn. If one

considered the inns in the Royal Capital to have a long and distinguished history,

then this inn of the Imperial Capital was a newly opened, high-end hotel, and

the question of which inn was better would be decided by personal preference.

“Alright, we can’t be sure until we go in to take a look, but I think we’ve got

the right place.”

Ainz briefly felt the adamantite rank-plate dangling at his chest, and then

headed for the inn’s entrance.

Much like in E-Rantel, the entrance was flanked by muscular guards in leather

armor. The men cast suspicious glances at Momon and Nabe as they walked

through the arch. Then, as they saw a certain item, their eyes suddenly went

wide.

“Is… is that the real thing? It must be, given their gear…”

He could hear them whispering to each other.

As Ainz walked before the tense, nervous guards, they politely asked him in

stiff tones:

“Please forgive me if I offend you, adamantite-ranked adventurer-sama, but

may I please see the proof of your identity?”

Ainz took off the plate and asked:

“Does this inn not take walk-in customers?”

“Yes. Unfortunately, in order to maintain the appropriate tone, our

establishment does not accommodate guests who have not been previously

introduced. But of course, you would be an exception, adamantite adventurer-

sama.”

One of the guards wiped his hands on his clothes, bowed deeply, and then

gingerly accepted the identity plate like it was something fragile.

He then turned it over and read out the letters there.

“Momon… the Black-sama?”

“Indeed.”

“I have verified it and there is no doubt! Thank you for offering us the proof

of your adamantite rank!”

Just like before, the guard carefully returned the plate to Ainz. The plates

which denoted an adventurer’s rank were made out of the material

corresponding to said rank, and this little piece of adamantite cost a tidy sum.

Granted, adamantite was a very hard metal and it would not be scuffed or

scratched just by dropping it on the ground, but if they misplaced it, they would

have to pay out a hefty amount. For example, a Crane Parrot — a crow-like bird

— might snatch it away from the side while it was being returned.

This was not a fable concocted to remind them to be careful when handling

valuable items. This was an actual example of what had happened in the past.

After Ainz took it back, the two guards looked visibly relieved, like a weight

had been taken off their shoulders.

“Then, may I come in?”

“Of course, Momon-sama. Please allow me to escort you to the concierge.”

“I see. Then, by all means.”

The Kingdom did not have the practice of tipping. Was it the same in the

Empire? Ainz thought about things like that as he let the guard lead them on.

After entering the inn, they passed through a lounge whose floor seemed to

be made of large stone slabs before heading straight to the concierge.

“I have with me the adamantite-ranked adventurer Momon-sama and his

companion.”

The cultured-looking man seated at the counter glanced at the guard. The

guard then bowed reverently to Ainz before returning to his post.

“I bid you welcome, Momon-sama. Please accept my sincerest thanks for

choosing to reside at our humble establishment for the duration of your stay in

the Imperial Capital.”

The man at the counter bowed deeply to Ainz.

“No, it’s fine. I’ll be staying here for a night.”

“Very well. Then, may I trouble you to sign our guest register?”

Ainz smiled under his closed helmet, then picked up the pen and wrote.

His signature read “Momon” in the language of the Kingdom. He had

practiced writing it dozens of times.

“Thank you very much. May I know what sort of room you would like?”

Personally, Ainz did not mind a cheap room. However, as usual, he could not

do that.

*I can’t eat, so a room without meals would be fine.*

Ainz recalled several dishes from this world.

There was a green-colored fruit juice with a sweet fragrance. There was

something pink which looked like scrambled eggs. There were also pieces of

sliced meat covered in some kind of blue liquid. They all piqued his curiosity,

but he could not eat them.

*…Libido, appetite and the need to sleep. This body of mine has a lot of benefits, but*

*I’ve lost a lot of things as well. What a shame. That said, if I still had my body of flesh,*

*there’s a high chance I might have lost myself in my desires…*

Ainz imagined himself in bed with Albedo, and his face twisted slightly.

That was because the mental image of a superior committing sexual

harassment on a female employee — or worse — had appeared in his mind.

*Granted, Albedo does seem to love me… this is a complicated feeling. If only I hadn’t*

*done that back then… oops!*

“Pardon me, just give us an appropriate room… by the way, since we don’t

have the common trade currency, can we pay with Kingdom coins?”

“Of course. The Kingdom’s currency and the Empire’s currency has always

been exchanged on a one-for-one basis.”

“I see. Then we shall have to impose upon you.”

“Very well, then we shall prepare a suitable room for you, Momon-sama.

Could I trouble you to wait for a while in the lounge bar?”

Ainz looked toward the bar in question. It was very spacious and gave off a

very classy feeling, and it looked like it could seat around 50 people. The chairs

looked like they would be very comfortable. A bard was performing quiet music

in the background.

“The food and drinks there are free of charge, so please feel free to relax at

your leisure.”

One received better service if one paid more. That much was the same in any

world where one went. However, this service did not please Ainz at all.

“Understood. Then, let’s go, Nabe.”

Ainz brought Nabe to the lounge bar and took a seat on a nearby chair.

There were several other guests in the lounge, all of whom appeared to be

adventurers.

High-level adventurers would receive massive payments just for a single job,

and their living standards would go up along to match. Living in an inn like this

was hardly a problem for them.

That was probably true for any city, be it the Royal Capital or E-Rantel.

Ainz checked to see that the adamantite plate around his neck was visible to

others. Letting the other guests talk among themselves and build his reputation

for him was a good idea too.

Ainz felt others look at him as he perused the drinks menu in front of him.

*I can’t read this…*

He flipped through the pages at random. He went through the menu despite

not being able to read it, in order to ward off suspicion.

Ainz had brought along the reading glasses he had lent to Sebas as a

precaution, but he could not take his time using them here.

“Sebas… Tsuare, huh.”

He recalled the face of his subordinate, and quietly spoke the name of the

woman whose name it called to mind.

“Has something happened to that woman?”

“Ah, no, it’s nothing important. I was just thinking about how she had adapted

to all of this.”

While he had entrusted Sebas with Tsuare’s care, Ainz had promised her his

protection, and as a business owner, he was obliged to pay attention to the well-

being of his employees.

“I think they will be fine. Currently… the Head Maid is in confinement, so

Sebas-sama is teaching her how to be a proper maid. After she learns the

appropriate etiquette, she will be taught how to cook and how to perform other

duties. Once we have determined what duties suit her, she will be officially

assigned a position.”

“I see. Very well, it should be fine handing the matter to Sebas. Also… I think

it’s about time we released those two from confinement… Albedo’s anger should

have cooled by now.”

Narberal did not answer. All she did was nod her head.

Sensing a lull in their conversation, the waiter approached them.

“Have you decided what you wish to order?”

“I’d like an iced macchiatia. Narberal?”

“The same for me.”

“Pick what you want to drink. It’s fine.”

“No, I do want the same thing. Ah, more milk in mine, please.”

“Very well.”

The waiter bowed deeply, and then retreated in silence.

Macchiatia was a drink Ainz had commonly seen in E-Rantel’s inns, and it

looked like a latte coffee. The smell was reminiscent of a latte as well, but Ainz

had also seen separate latte and regular coffees. Incidentally, Ainz had no idea

what it tasted like. It went without saying that he could not drink it. He had

tried, of course, but it had all leaked out through the bottom of his chin and he

had not been able to taste anything.

However, he ended up ordering it anyway, because it looked like something

which only high-class establishments would sell. He felt that it suited places like

these.

As Ainz wiped away his nonexistent sweat, Ainz asked Narberal a question in

a matter-of-fact way.

“…Nabe, what does macchiatia taste like?”

He had asked her because he knew she had drunk it before.

Narberal paused to think. This was probably the sort of look one would have

on their face if they were thinking about how to explain the taste of coffee to

someone else.

“How shall I put this. It is very much like a caffe shakerato.[1] However, it

tastes of condensed milk, so I do not quite like it.”

“…Is that so. That sounds delicious.”

*Shakerato? I’ve never heard of a drink like that before. It might also be a beverage*

*unique to this world.*

“I feel it is merely passable.”

Ainz casually responded, and then the drinks came.

“Don’t mind me, just help yourself. It would be strange if both of us didn’t

touch our drinks.”

He had grown used to not removing his helmet in the Kingdom, and so Ainz

had completely forgotten to take it off when the drinks came. The way he said

so in such a natural way felt very unnatural.

“Thank you very much.”

“Drink, then, and listen to me as you do. I plan to spend two days seeing the

sights of the Imperial Capital. I hear that the central markets have a wide variety

of stock, and just browsing them is quite interesting. Then, there’s the northern

markets, which seem to contain a majority of shops stocking magic items.

Adventurers go there regularly.”

That information had been provided by Eight Fingers, who were now under

Ainz’s thumb. They had also supplied a lot of news about the underworld, but

Ainz had no intention of getting involved in such matters, so he had only

skimmed that information.

“We’ll proceed to the Adventurer’s Guild on the third day. I’d like to meet and

get to know the Empire’s adamantite-ranked adventurers, but if that’s not

1. 1. A shakerato is a popular Italian drink prepared by shaking espresso, ice, and simple syrup in a

cocktail shaker until the mixture obtains a frothy consistency.

possible, we’ll just take a simple, quickly completed task to spread our fame… if

all goes as planned, we will be able to leave within seven days. Do you have any

suggestions?”

Narberal — who had not touched her drink, but was only listening in silence

— simply shook her head.

# *2*

# 

# 

# 

The Imperial Capital was the crystallization of the Empire’s authority, and it

contained many sights which would make a person gasp in awe. One of them

made just about every visitor to the Imperial Capital exclaim in wonder. That

was — the fact that just about every street was paved with brick or stones.

That was a sight which one could not see in the surrounding countries —

other than the Slaine Theocracy, which was even more advanced than this

place. Of course, not every city in the Empire was this way. Even so, it was a

subtle yet potent testament to the Empire’s strength and power, one which

had impressed the ambassadors of the surrounding countries.

Of particular note was the Central Avenue. It was a major thoroughfare of

the Imperial Capital, and much like other public streets, the center was for

horses and carriages, while the sides were for human traffic.

The difference was that there were safety fences set up along the dividing

lines between the parts for people and the parts for horses and carriages, in

order to ensure the safety of pedestrians. Street lights sprouted on either side

of the road, and they glowed with magical light after nightfall. Speaking of

which, many knights were on patrol, mindful of the safety of their

surroundings.

A smiling man strolled casually along this road, the safest in the Empire,

humming as he went.

The man was roughly 175cm tall, and he looked to be around the age of 20.

His hair was blond and his eyes were blue, while his skin had a healthy tan.

His looks were hardly uncommon in the Empire.

One could not say he was particularly handsome, and his even features were

the sort which would be easily lost in a crowd. However, he radiated a subtle

charisma. The source of that charisma seemed to come from the faint, yet

lively smile on his face, as well as his confident and open gestures.

With every step he took, the sound of chain links clinking rang forth from

beneath his spotless, high-grade clothing. A sharp individual would be able to

tell that it was the sound of a chain shirt.

He had a blade on either hip. Each was around the length of a short sword.

They had round, fully enclosed knuckle guards, and while their sheaths were

hardly exquisite in make, they were clearly not cheap stuff. Behind his waist

was a mace for bludgeoning attacks and a mail-piercer for piercing attacks.

Carrying one or even two weapons was a perfectly reasonable thing in this

world. But very few people would carry all the weapons needed to execute

bludgeoning, piercing and slashing attack methods.

Anyone knowledgeable would recognize him for an adventurer. Anyone who

was *truly* knowledgeable would notice that he lacked the plate which

adventurers wore around their necks, and would thus conclude that he was a

“Worker.”

# 

●

# 

Workers. They were those who had deviated from the path of the standard

adventurer.

The Adventurer’s Guild would take on, research and assign requests to the

appropriately ranked adventurers. In other words, the Guild would thoroughly

investigate the legitimacy of any job requests made of them. Therefore, the

Guild sometimes rejected dangerous work — things that would endanger

civilians or which were illegal in nature. Depending on the circumstances, they

might even consider the requester to be an enemy. For instance, the Guild

would oppose work like looking for raw ingredients for narcotics with all its

might.

The Guild would also reject requests which threatened the balance of

nature. For example, the Guild would never accept requests to kill the apex

predator of a forest. This was to avoid the disruption to the natural order

which would result from killing such a creature, such as other monsters leaving

the forest. Of course, if the apex monster left the forest of its own accord and

invaded human lands, that would be a different matter entirely.

In other words, adventurers were sort of like allies of justice.

However, such high-sounding ideals were not the only thing which made the

world go around.

It was quite easy to imagine that some people were willing to do dangerous

jobs for money. And then there were those people who simply enjoyed killing

monsters.

These people — who did not seek the light of the adventurer’s life, but who

thirsted for the darkness — were dropouts from the adventuring profession.

They were known as Workers, and people spoke that name with mockery and

caution.

However, one could not say that all Workers were cut from the same cloth.

For instance — if there was a heavily wounded boy in a village and an

adventurer who happened to be passing by used curative magic on him to heal

his injuries free of charge, would the adventurer be in the right or wrong?

The answer was that he would be wrong.

The Guild rules stated that adventurers had to collect a fixed fee for such

treatment, and they could not provide healing for free.

Under normal circumstances, healing magic was handled by the temples, and

a patient would need to make a donation before the temples would cast a spell

on him. If an adventurer disregarded that point and provided free healing, he

would be taking the temples’ business.

Therefore, the temples made a strongly worded request to the Guild to curb

such activities.

If one could not accept these rules, then one would have to be a Worker.

This might sound like malice on the temples’ part, but it was because they

could profit from their spells that the temples could render service unto the

people without having to worry about outside interference. In addition, it was

these donations which paid for the raising and training of priests, the exorcism

of the undead, the development of new healing spells, all in order for people to

lead safer and happier lives.

If adventurers cast healing spells for free, the temples might be forced to

become more secular, and slowly abandon their ideals.

There were two sides to every coin, and Workers were no exception. It was

because they poached animals for money that cheap drugs could be made,

which in turn improved people’s lives.

# 

●

# 

This man — Hekkeran Termite — was a Worker, and he was smiling.

“What should I buy?”

There were countless magic items that he wanted, but in the end his top

priority was defensive gear. Then, there was one more thing. It was an

unrelated matter, but there was something else that he wanted.

“I’ll set aside the money for that… the rest can go to magic items for

adventuring. Hm? Isn’t that the wrong way around? I ought to buy the magic

items first and save whatever’s left over for that.”

Hekkeran scratched his head.

In that case—

“As a frontliner, I ought to boost my magical resistances, so I guess it’s time

to draw on my savings. No, we might continue killing undead on the Katze

Plains for money, so in order to ward against corpse toxins, I should be buying

magic items which boost my resistance to poison, paralysis and disease.”

Magical equipment was very expensive, in particular the sort which

adventurers used in combat. One-of-a-kind items could be so expensive that

Hekkeran could not afford them.

In any case, the items Hekkeran wanted were not that expensive, but they

still cost as much as years of an average person’s wages. Of course he would

carefully consider making such a costly purchase.

As he looked forward to his shopping, his eyes met those of the knights

standing by the roadside for an instant, and his easygoing expression

immediately tightened up.

A tag team of a heavily armored knight and a lightly armored knight stood at

the street corner, surveying the surrounding conditions.

Everyone knew that the temples to the Four Gods were in the vicinity, and

so security was especially strict here. While he doubted that they would arrest

people off the streets, Hekkeran could sense their gazes resting on the

weapons at his waist.

It would be one thing if he was an adventurer, but as a Worker without any

form of backing, he did not wish to go up against the knights who enforced the

Empire’s safety.

The gods seemed to have smiled on him, because the knights compared his

face to a wanted list, but did not stop him. Thus, he passed through the densely

packed temple district.

His guilty conscience at ease, Hekkeran looked into the distance and saw a

unique-looking building ahead. At the same time, the wind carried the sound of

cheering to him — he could hear bloodthirsty voices and battle cries in the air.

That unique building was the grand arena that could only be found in the

Imperial Capital of the Empire. It was a very popular tourist spot within the

Imperial Capital.

There was no need for him to go all the way there. He saw more than enough

blood in the course of his work, and he had no interest in gambling, so one

could say that that place did not interest him at all. However, it was still the

biggest entertainment outlet for the common man in the Imperial Capital —

the nobles preferred the theater. Given the cheers had reached all the way

here, the arena must have been packed to the brim once more.

“The crowd sounds really excited; is it a final?”

The Worker team which Hekkeran led had fought a series of battles against

magical beasts in the arena for work purposes. Surrenders were useless against

magical beasts, so defeat meant death. Of course, battles against human beings

could be fatal, but it was very rare that the day’s activities in the arena did not

conclude without a single fatality. Or no, the more people who died, the more

fired up the crowd became.

The most heavily attended shows were the grand fighting tournaments,

where many people died beautiful deaths.

Hekkeran shrugged.

He had no interest in this. He did not feel like looking at a blood-soaked

battlefield on a day off work. However, he did not fully chase the notion out of

his mind, because the various events within the arena might make for excellent

conversation topics.

*I don’t want to step into the arena again, but it might be a good idea to ask others*

*about the details of today’s show when I get back.*

After making a mental note of that, he continued walking along a road lined

with shops. Soon, he saw a familiar signboard with the words “Singing Apple

Pavilion” written on it.

Apparently, a group of bards who all used applewood instruments came

together to found this tavern-cum-inn. It looked old, but the interior was

surprisingly sturdy and clean. There were no gaps in the walls to let the wind

in, and the floorboards were brightly polished. Naturally, staying here was not

cheap, but it was not completely unaffordable either. To Hekkeran and his

crew — no, to all Workers, this was arguably the highest-grade inn around.

Granted, it could not measure up to the finest establishments of the

Imperial Capital. But those places were best suited for aboveboard

adventurers; they were not at all suited for Workers.

For starters, people who hired Workers generally had dirty jobs to offer.

Therefore, their clients would hesitate about having to walk into conspicuous

locations. However, if they set their meeting point in a place with poor security

because of that, it might wind up causing trouble for them.

In addition, the fact that many other Worker teams used this place as a

home base made the Singing Apple Pavilion popular with the requesters. That

was because unlike with the Adventurer’s Guild, someone looking to hire

Workers had to find them with their own connections. Therefore, having the

Workers scattered all over the place was very troublesome for the requesters.

Another reason for the Workers to stay at this inn was because staying in the

same place fostered a sense of closeness with each other, which would reduce

the chances of requests where they might have to fight each other. Finally —

and most importantly — the food here was delicious.

Hekkeran thought about dinner as he stepped through the door. He hoped

that he would be able to have his favorite pork broth.

While he pondered the topic, the first thing which greeted him was not his

friends saying, “oh, you’re back” or “thanks for your hard work.”

“—I told you already! I don’t know!”

“No, no, if you say that, it’ll put me in quite a fix…”

“I’m not that girl’s keeper and I’m not her relative, how would I know where

she went?”

“Aren’t you companions? I can’t just walk away meekly because you say you

don’t know. This is my job!”

A man and a woman were glaring at each other in the middle of the bar-cum-

dining room’s first floor.

The woman’s face was very familiar to him.

Her face lacked the slightest trace of fat and her eyes were vicious. The most

eye-catching features of this woman were her ears, which were far longer than

those of ordinary people. Still, they were only half as long as those of a Forest

Elf’s. Indeed, she was a Half-Elf.

Forest Elves were slimmer than a human being, and after seeing her body, it

was clear that she had inherited that bloodline trait. She was slender from head

to toe, and her bosom and buttocks lacked a woman’s fullness. They looked like

someone had welded iron slabs in place over them, and if one looked solely at

her body, they might mistake her for a man.

She wore a tight-fitting suit of leather armor. The bow and quiver she

usually carried were not on her person. The only weapon she had was the

shortsword at her waist.

Her name was Imina. She was one of Hekkeran’s companions.

However, he did not recognize the man in front of Imina.

The man appeared to be bowing and scraping, but there was no trace of

apology in his eyes. In fact, there was a look in there which annoyed Hekkeran.

Still, at least he was being polite, so he had some brains.

The man’s arms and chest bulged with muscle, and he looked intimidating

just standing there. People like him would probably not hesitate in using

violence, but brute force was useless against Imina.

That was because Imina looked frail, but she had first-rate skills, and she was

capable of easily slaughtering a mook who thought he was something.

“That’s what I’ve been telling you all this while!”

As he heard that angry, high-pitched voice, Hekkeran hurriedly interrupted.

“What are you doing, Imina?”

It was only when she heard Hekkeran’s voice that Imina noticed him and

turned around. Then, a look of surprise appeared on her face.

A ranger with keen senses like herself had gotten so lost in her words that

she had failed to notice Hekkeran’s presence. That indicated just how worked

up she was.

“…Who’re you?”

The man took Hekkeran to be an unwanted interferer and questioned him in

a threatening tone. The man’s gaze was keen, and he radiated an aura which

suggested that he might start hitting anyone at any time. However, Hekkeran

had frequently faced down vicious monsters and survived the encounter, so all

it got out of him was a wry grin.

“…He’s our leader.”

“Ohhhh, wonderful. You must be Hekkeran Termite-san, then. I’ve heard of

you.”

The man’s expression changed immediately, becoming an ingratiating smile

which filled Hekkeran with mild revulsion.

Hekkeran did not know why this man had come here, but the fact that he

had come to this inn — the base of operations for Hekkeran’s group — meant

that it was unlikely that he did not know about what Hekkeran did for a living.

Perhaps his threatening tone from just now had been intended to gauge

Hekkeran. If Hekkeran had flinched, the man would have continued speaking

in overbearing tones.

Among Workers and adventurers, there were those people who could kill

monsters without blinking an eye, but who would recoil from human beings.

However, these people would only take a step back momentarily. If pressed,

they would draw their weapons and they might end up killing the opposition.

*We’ve just met and he’s already trying to scare me to show who’s boss… this guy… I*

*dislike his type.*

Hekkeran understood that this was a negotiation technique. It was also a

very obvious one. However, Hekkeran disliked negotiations like these. He

preferred to speak his mind and get straight to the point.

“…You’re being noisy. This is an inn. There are other guests around. Do you

really want to make a ruckus here?”

That said, there were hardly any guests nearby, and even the inn staff were

gone.

It was not that they had hidden away, because squabbles like this were like

appetizers for Workers. It was simple coincidence that nobody was around.

Hekkeran stared at the man’s face. The other man could not hold up against

the glare of a mythril-ranked warrior. He immediately cowered as though he

were facing a magical beast.

“No, no, no, I’m sorry, but I have my reasons too.”

The man had lowered his voice somewhat, but he still wanted to continue

speaking. Given the way he was still sticking to his guns in the face of

Hekkeran’s glare, he must have been well-versed in the application of force —

particularly violence.

*Why did a man like this come here?*

It was true that Hekkeran was involved in shady business, but he did not

recognize this man, nor had he done anything to warrant such an attitude.

Neither did he look like he was going to offer a job.

Baffled, Hekkeran decided to ease off on his glaring and directly asked him a

question.

“…What’s going on?”

“It’s nothing. I just wanted to meet with your friend Furt-san, Hekkeran-

san.”

There was only one person Hekkeran could think of when the word “Furt”

came up.

Hekkeran did not feel she would be connected to this man in any way,

because she was a comrade who had been through countless life-or-death

struggles at Hekkeran’s side. That being the case, she must be in some sort of

trouble.

“Arche? What happened to her?”

“Arche… right, yes. We know her as Furt-san, so I couldn’t recall her name

for a moment. Mm, it’s Arche Eeb Ryle Furt-san.”

“So?! What do you want with Arche?”

“It’s nothing, I just want to talk to her… it’s a private matter, so I’d like to

ask when she’ll be coming back—”

“As if I’d know!”

Hekkeran rudely interrupted the other man. Such was his abruptness that

the other man was close to rolling his eyes in annoyance.

“Now then, are you done yet?”

“I… it can’t be helped. I’ll wait here for a while…”

“Get lost.”

Hekkeran jerked his chin at the door, and his attitude left the other man

staring dumbly.

“Let me make this abundantly clear. Your face is pissing me off and I can’t

bear to have you within my line of sight for a moment longer.”

“This is a tavern, I—”

“Oh yes. It *is* a tavern. It’s also a place where drunkards often get into

fights.”

Hekkeran smiled evilly at the man.

“No need to be so tense, relax. Even if you get drawn into a fight and get

badly hurt, we’ve got a priest who knows healing magic. All you have to do is

pay.”

“You’d better take more of his money, or the temples won’t be happy. I don’t

want their assassins after me,” Imina added from the side, with a wicked smile

on her face.

“Well, we’ll give you a special discount, so you’ll be grateful, right?”

“—Got that?”

“If you’re threatening me—”

The man’s words cut off halfway, because he saw the expression on

Hekkeran’s face changing rapidly.

Hekkeran suddenly stepped forward, so close that the other man’s face filled

his line of sight.

“Hah? Threatening you? Who’s threatening you? Fights are common in a

tavern, aren’t they? I’m giving you good advice here and you say I’m *threatening*

you? Are you looking for trouble, huh?!”

The veins popped on Hekkeran’s forehead. His face was that of a man who

had experienced numerous brushes with death.

Cowed by his presence, the man took a step back, though he went “tch,”

unwilling to concede defeat. Then, he ran for the door. He tried his best to

pretend otherwise, but it was clear to everyone that he had been scared off.

When he reached the exit, he turned around and spat one last reply at

Hekkeran and Imina.

“Tell the Furt girl! The deadline’s here!”

“Ahhh?!”

Hekkeran’s low growl sent the man fleeing from the inn.

After the shouting man vanished, Hekkeran resumed his original expression.

That change was so great that it was almost comical. In truth, Imina was

applauding him quietly.

“So, what was that all about?”

“No clue. He only told me what he told you.”

“Good grief. If I’d known, I’d had asked him to explain in more detail.”

He grabbed his head in annoyance.

“We’ll ask Arche when she gets back.”

“…Still, I’m not too eager to stick my nose into others’ business.”

“Mm, alright, I understand. Still, you’re the leader, so do your best.”

“Then I’ll invoke my leader’s authority and order you, as a fellow woman, to

ask her, Imina.”

“Give me a break, I don’t want to ask her either.”

The two of them smiled bitterly at each other.

Both adventurers and Workers had several taboos.

The first was that they could not look into or ask about each other’s pasts.

The next was that they had to hide excessive desire.

Since desire drove many people to become Workers, it was unavoidable to

some extent. However, being too open about it kept the team from functioning

normally. For example, if a teammate whined about money, would anyone

trust him when it came to a job which involved handling a large sum of cash or

when keeping a secret which absolutely could not be leaked? Would anyone

dare sleep in the same room as someone who desired the opposite sex all day

long? Everyone had to count on each other when their lives were in danger. At

the very least, every member of a team had to trust each other.

The fact that Arche had gotten herself into trouble like this was a massive

blemish on her reliability. It was most definitely not something which could be

waved away with a simple, “there, there.”

As people who worked a job with a very real risk of death, they could not

allow any factors of unease to remain.

Hekkeran scratched his head, his expression clearly reluctant.

“It can’t be helped. I’ll ask her when she gets back.”

“Please do~”

Imina smiled and waved, and Hekkeran glared at her.

“What, are you trying to run away? You’re asking her with me.”

“But whyyyy~”

Imina pouted but she could only give up when she saw that Hekkeran’s face

was unchanged.

“Nothing to be done about it. I just hope the situation isn’t too serious.”

“So where is she now, anyway?”

“Hm? Oh, she’s gone to collect information about the details of that job.”

“Weren’t Rober and I supposed to do that?”

After Hekkeran and the others had finished clearing the undead from the

Katze Plains, they had returned to the Imperial Capital, whereupon they had

received a new request. The terms of the request were pretty good for their

team, so everyone was inclined towards accepting it. However, they would

need to research it first.

They had agreed beforehand that their best speaker Roberdyck would

investigate the details of their employer and the reasons why he had sought

them out, while Hekkeran would go to the Empire’s government offices —

eliminating the undead of the Katze Plains was a national enterprise — and

collect the payment for slaying the undead, and then help Roberdyck in his

investigations.

Imina and Arche should have been waiting here for further instructions.

“In addition, she said she wanted to investigate the conditions and history of

our objective.”

*No wonder,* Hekkeran nodded. Arche might have abandoned her studies in

the Imperial Mage Academy, but she still retained her connections. Nobody

could gather academic knowledge like she could. On top of that, she could

consult the Magician’s Guild for information.

“So that’s why she went running around with Rober. After all, he also knows

quite a bit and has connections with the temples. Then how about your end?”

“Well, about that…”

Hekkeran took a seat as he spoke in a hushed voice.

“I know why they want Workers. Or rather, I know why you can’t hire

adventurers to go to the place in question. However, the requester also said

that he was looking for other teams, that much should be true.”

“Are we seriously going to work with other people? They might be ruins that

nobody’s ever entered before, but is the requester sure that we’ll get big

returns from it?”

“The team I asked — Gringam’s people — said so too. Heavy Masher seems

prepared to accept, and we need to decide whether or not we’re accepting it by

tomorrow.”

They had only listened to the details of the request, and they had not

accepted it yet. While they had until tomorrow to respond, there would be

additional preparations to be made if they accepted.

“And a conflict that just happens to come up now, at this crucial time… you

think it’s related?”

“We can’t completely rule out the possibility that one of the other teams has

a hand in this. However, we have to hear Arche out before deciding. If it’s

another team up to their tricks behind our backs, it would be better not to

accept. Or perhaps we ought to accept while being fully prepared for a

confrontation?”

“Of course we should accept. If they have a bone to pick with us, then we’ll

beat them up until the only thing they’re picking is their teeth from the floor.

That’ll teach them to mess with us.”

“That’s pretty extreme.”

Imina was far more intense than her looks suggested, but Hekkeran felt that

her proposition had merit.

While others looking down on them was not the end of the world, it would

definitely damage their reputation. Considering Workers were one foot into

the underworld, it was something they needed to avoid.

A determined light filled his eyes as he nodded silently, and then the sound

of wood scraping rang through the tavern. The forms of two people stepped in

through the opened door.

“—Back.”

“We’ve returned.”

The first voice belonged to a girl and sounded like a whisper. A beat later, it

was followed by an elegant, proper male voice. In all likelihood, he had wanted

to avoid drowning out the girl’s quiet words.

The first person to enter was a skinny woman, someone who could still be

called a girl.

She looked to be in her late teens. Her lustrous hair was neatly trimmed at

her shoulder, while her eyes and nose were perfectly positioned. She was not

so much beautiful as elegant. However, she had an inorganic, doll-like quality

about her.

In her hand was a metal staff that was about as tall as she was. Said staff was

inscribed with Countless inscriptions which looked like characters and

symbols. She wore a loose, long robe. Underneath that were various thick

articles of clothing which provided her with a modicum of defense. One could

tell at a glance that she was a magic caster.

The man wore a suit of full plate armor — albeit without a full-faced helm —

and over it was a surcoat stitched with a holy symbol. He had a morningstar at

his waist, and a holy symbol which matched his tabard hung at his neck.

His facial features were rough, and his hair was parted. His tiny mustache

was neatly trimmed and he gave others the impression of being relaxed. He

looked to be around 30 years old.

They were Hekkeran’s other friends, Arche Eeb Ryle Furt and Roberdyck

Goltron.

“Oh, you’re back.”

Was this good or bad timing? Hekkeran addressed the two of them in stiff

tones.

“What happened to the two of you?”

Roberdyck spoke in a tone which did not sound like a senior person

addressing his two juniors. Part of that was because of his character, but it was

also because he viewed them as fellow, equal Workers.

“It… it’s nothing.”

“Yeah… that’s right, it’s nothing.”

The two of them looked suspiciously at Hekkeran and Imina as they waved

their hands.

“Er, anyway, let’s not talk here. We’ll speak over there.”

Hekkeran’s face turned serious and he stopped fooling around. Then, he

pointed to a round table deeper within the room.

“Before that, how about drinks… Oi, Imina, where’s the boss?”

Imina looked at him with a face that seemed to say, “why are you only asking

that now?”

“…He went shopping. I’m minding the place for him.”

“Seriously? Then what should we drink? Anything we want?”

“—I’ll pass.”

“Ah, I can go without.”

“…Really now. Then, mm… then we’ll begin this meeting of Foresight.”

Everyone’s original expressions were gone now. They leaned slightly in,

bringing their faces close to their colleagues. They could not help it even

though there was nobody else around; one could say it was a professional habit.

“Let’s verify the details of the request.”

After ensuring that everyone’s eyes were on him, Hekkeran continued

speaking. His tone was vastly different from just now. He was serious when he

had to be serious, just like how a team leader ought to be.

“Our client is Count Femel, and the request is to investigate a set of ruins

within the Kingdom’s borders — a structure which seems to be some kind of

underground tomb. We’ll be paid 200 up front and 150 after completion.

Unusually enough, the down payment is higher than the rest of the fee, and the

overall amount is very large. In addition, there might be a bonus in it for us

depending on the results of the investigation. However, all magic items we find

will go to the Count. According to them, they’ll pay the discoverers half the

market value for anything they find. Precious stones, works of art and so on

will be valued and then split 50/50. In addition, the requester has also been

negotiating with other Workers’ parties at the same time, and depending on

the circumstances, there might be more than one team on this expedition —

proving what I said earlier.”

Hekkeran shared the news he had learned with Arche and Roberdyck, and

then went on to explain the details.

“The expedition will be three days long at the most, and our objective is to

perform a thorough investigation of the ruins. The biggest problem is that

these ruins are probably going to be filled with monsters, and we’ll need to

scout out their lairs and so on. In other words, a standard ruin delve.”

Abandoned cities and the like were usually nests for monsters, and so when

Workers “investigated ruins,” it was more like a “reconnaissance in force.”

“Still, the most important thing is that it looks like an undiscovered tomb.”

The mood in the air changed as that fact was mentioned.

200 years ago, several countries had been destroyed as the Demon Gods

rampaged throughout the land. It was not just human kingdoms which had

been devastated, but those of demi-humans and heteromorphs. These ruined

kingdoms sometimes concealed priceless treasures; namely, magic items.

Discovering such things was arguably the dream of adventurers and Workers.

Therefore, adventurers and Workers often longed to discover unexplored

ruins. And now, one such ruin had appeared before their eyes.

As he saw the gleam in his comrades’ eyes, Hekkeran yielded the speaker’s

role to his two friends who had returned after collecting information.

“Also, the Count will handle transportation to and from the tomb, as well as

our rations. That’s it. Now then, Arche, Roberdyck, tell us what you’ve

learned.”

“—First off, Count Femel’s position in court is precarious. Apparently the

Bloody Emperor has been treating him coldly. However, he is not in any

financial difficulty.”

“Regarding that ruin within the Kingdom, Arche and I did some research,

but we haven’t heard of any ruins in the area, or any cities in the past. Since it’s

a tomb, there ought to be some information about it left behind… Frankly

speaking, I have no idea why there would be a tomb there. The only thing in

the area is a small village; perhaps we could learn something if we asked

around. What do you think?”

“Can’t do that. We were asked to keep our movements secret. The requester

said that we were to eliminate any witnesses, and he hoped we would not have

to do so.”

“—Of course, that region is Crown-controlled territory. If we act rashly,

we’ll be making enemies of the Vaiself Royal Family of the Kingdom.”

The fact that they were delving into a ruin in a foreign nation was practically

a crime, which was why they had not hired adventurers, but Workers.

“In other words, this is the usual dirty business, am I correct?”

“Yes. However, there are some sensitive issues.”

“Indeed. the Empire’s Workers causing trouble in the Kingdom will lead to

all sorts of problems. If things go badly, it might even affect the Count

himself.”

“In that case, there’s only one more problem left.”

“That is, the origin of the information about the tomb, am I correct?”

“Indeed. It smells fishy, no matter how you slice it.”

“Does it? It’s near the Great Forest of Tob, right? What if they found it while

cutting down the forest?”

“—That would be strange. Look at this.”

Arche opened up a map and circled a certain location.

“The exact location is unclear, but it ought to be around this area.”

Her delicate finger slid over the map’s surface, and then tapped twice.

“—And then this is the village, though it’s so small that perhaps it might be

better to call it a hamlet instead. I don’t think a village like that could clear-cut

a forest.”

“Indeed. A small village ought to have a hard time clearing a dangerous

forest… Perhaps the Kingdom cleared it for some national enterprise, but

there’s nothing which would offer any national-scaled benefits nearby, and

more to the point, no news about it has leaked out.”

The four of them were worried. They did not know if they should accept this

assignment.

Since they did not have an Adventurer’s Guild to back them up, they had to

thoroughly investigate the job themselves, starting with their employer’s

background and the location of the job. After that, they had to check out the

details of the job itself before they could accept it. Even after doing all that,

they still ran into trouble time after time.

Their jobs were a gamble with their lives as the stake. No Worker could do

the job without telling themselves that no amount of checking was enough. If

they sniffed out a hint of danger which they could not handle, then they would

have to refuse the job, no matter how good the terms.

“…I’ve done some checking on the payment side, and as for the deposit…”

Hekkeran put a metal plate on the table. If they rejected the job, they would

have to return it to the client. Various tiny characters were inscribed on its

surface.

“—I checked the credit plate with the Imperial Bank, and it’s been fully paid

up. We can exchange it for cash at any time.”

Credit plates were a guarantee of payment from the Imperial Bank that

functioned like a check.

They were intricately made as a countermeasure against forgery. Their

drawbacks included being tedious to use and the fact that one had to pay

processing fees to use them, but there were many advantages to them.

The Adventurer’s Guild usually handled this sort of thing in other countries,

but the country itself guaranteed this in the Empire.

“That means it’s not a trap… alright, the truth is, I had the feeling that the

other side was serious from the moment I got this plate.”

If they were planning to set a trap, then there would be no need to pay such

a large deposit as a hiring fee — of course, the opposition might have done just

that to catch people off-guard, but Hekkeran did not know this noble and had

no quarrel with him.

“I…”

“Stop. Imina, I’m not finished yet. I hope you can be a bit more flexible in

your thinking.”

“Fine, fine, fine. Then tell me something. There are a few questionable

points about this job, like how the employer’s hiring several teams. Why is

that?”

Imina had a point. It would be unwise to use more than one team for a time-

critical task, after considering the time needed to contact each of them. It

defied explanation.

“—I’m not sure. Frankly speaking, I don’t know why they’re in such a rush to

check the place out. I haven’t heard of any emergencies involving the Count or

anyone related to him, or any ceremonies to be hosted in the next few days. If

you really wanted me to give an answer, maybe he’s afraid of someone on the

Kingdom’s side finding the ruins? And maybe hiring multiple teams was to

increase the chances of success?”

“Say, Hekkeran? Didn’t you ask Gringam about all that?”

“As if he’d tell me that much! Just asking him if our client hired him took a

lot of effort, and I had to keep our own info from leaking out.”

Hekkeran shrugged, indicating that he was out of ideas.

“—There’s another possibility, which is that someone is going up against the

Count.”

“That’s possible. If that were the case, then the rushed investigation and

hiring a lot of people would make sense. Right, right. Apparently, something

big happened in the Kingdom recently, but it doesn’t seem to be directly

connected to the ruins near E-Rantel…”

“Tell us about it too, Rober.”

“I didn’t learn too much about it, only some rumors,” Roberdyck said, and

then he launched into a muddled explanation of the disturbance in the Royal

Capital. Collecting more information would have taken time, but he lacked

reliable information now.

“Hm~ doesn’t seem related, yet it seems related too. In any case, what Arche

said is most likely. Plus, Rober agrees too.”

“Assuming that’s the case… considering the client’s planning to hire multiple

Worker teams and the fact that we’re working in the Kingdom’s territory, are

we going to end up competing with a lot of officially-hired adventurers from

the Kingdom? If that’s the case, then we’re just wasting our time no matter

how much info we gather within the Empire’s borders.”

“We also need to be wary of teams hired by another client — in other words,

traitors. I don’t want to end up getting stabbed in the back by our own side just

as we think we’ve completed our task.”

“Traitors or adventurers. If I had to choose, maybe adventurers might be

better. At least you can reason with them and keep things from blowing up too

much.”

“After all, we might actually end up killing each other if it’s between

Workers.”

“—What do you plan to do, leader?”

Everyone had said their piece. All that was left now was to try and figure

things out and predict how they would go.

“Before I decide, I have something I want to say… or rather, something I

want to ask. This is vital.”

Hekkeran took a deep breath, and beside him, Imina sighed.

“Arche, a weird man was looking for you.”

Arche’s face was initially blank, like a mannequin’s, but at that moment, her

brows twitched. Judging by her reaction, Hekkeran was sure that she knew that

person.

“That guy said something at the end… what did he say?”

Hekkeran turned to Imina, and she immediately shot back a look which said,

“What are you playing at?!” In the end, she realized that Hekkeran really did

not remember, and she replied in a tired tone:

“Tell the Furt girl! The deadline’s here!”

“Or something along those lines.”

Everyone’s eyes focused on Arche. She paused a beat, and then spoke in

leaden tones.

“—I owe him money.”

“You owe him?”

Hekkeran exclaimed in surprise. Of course, it was not just Hekkeran, but

Imina and Roberdyck who were shocked as well. The money they made as

Workers was evenly divided among them, so they knew exactly how much each

of their colleagues earned. When they thought about the payment they had

received, it was hard to imagine she would end up owing someone money.

“How much do you owe?”

“—300 gold coins.”

After hearing Arche’s reply, everyone looked at each other again.

This was an astounding amount when one considered the amount of money

a regular person made. Even Workers of their caliber could not earn that much

money in one go. The total payment for this job was 350 gold coins, but that

was for the entire team. After deducting necessary expenses and turning them

into a shared fund used to buy consumable items and other team resources, the

remaining money would be divided among them. In the end, each person

would only receive about 60 gold coins.

Their team was quite highly ranked among the Workers. If one went by the

adventurers’ ranking system, they would be around mythril rank. Yet even a

group at their level could not make that much money in one payout. How had

she come to owe so much money?

Arche’s expression turned gloomy. She had probably sensed everyone’s

doubtful gazes.

It was only natural that she would not want to speak of it, but she had no

choice but to do so. If she decided to break off the discussion here, being

expelled from the party was a perfectly understandable outcome.

Perhaps she was worried about that problem, but in the end Arche finally

spoke.

“—I’ve kept quiet about this all this time because it’s a family shame… my

family used to be nobles, but we were stripped of our status by the Bloody

Emperor.”

The Bloody Emperor — Jircniv Rune Farlord El-Nix.

Just like his nickname suggested, he was an emperor whose hands were

stained with blood.

His father — the previous Emperor, had died and left his position empty.

After that, he had broken ties with one of the Five Great Nobles — in other

words, the Empress Dowager’s family — on suspicion of plotting to assassinate

the Emperor. After that, he killed his siblings one after the other. As though

she had been caught up in the storm of death which swept the city, his mother

had perished from an accident during this time as well.

Of course, there had been opposition to him. However, the Bloody Emperor

had taken control of the knights and their military prowess during his time as

Crown Prince, so they were no match for him. Backed with overwhelming

military might, he wiped out the influential nobles like he was scything down

grain. In the end, all that remained were a group who pledged loyalty to the

Emperor on the surface, regardless of their true intentions, and thus he had

consolidated all power into himself.

However, the Bloody Emperor did not stop there. He stripped many nobles

of their social position in the name of weeding out incompetents. In contrast,

talented individuals could be elevated to lofty heights, even if they were

commoners, and thus he built the basis of his power upon that policy.

There were two points about all this which awed those who witnessed this.

The first was the masterful way in which he had orchestrated his purge of the

nobles in such a way as to not diminish the power of the Empire, despite the

purge’s scope. The second was that the Emperor who had accomplished such

an incredible feat was not yet 15 years of age.

Many nobles had fallen on hard times because of him. However—

“—However, my parents are still living a noble lifestyle. Of course, we didn’t

have the money to support such a lifestyle, so they had to borrow money from

shady places to make ends meet.”

Hekkeran, Imina and Roberdyck looked at each other.

Arche had hidden it well, but her voice was still flavored with a hint of

annoyance, displeasure and anger.

“—I’m confident in my magical abilities, please let me join.” That was what

the tiny, skinny girl — who clutched a staff that was taller than she was — had

said to them. Hekkeran was not the only one who recalled the dumbfounded

way in which they had stared at her when she said that, as well as the look of

shock on their faces when they had seen the true power of Arche’s magic. All

these memories returned to their minds.

Over two years had passed since that day, and they had gone through many

adventures together. Yet, even after making a tidy sum of money from

adventures fraught with the risk of death, Arche’s equipment had not changed

much.

Now, they finally understood the reason for that.

“Seriously? Do you want us to go beat some sense into them?”

“They need to hear the word of the gods. No, maybe they need to feel the

fists of the gods first.”

“Maybe their ears are all stuffed up, surely punching a hole in them would be

more important!”

“—Please wait. Things being what they are, please let me talk to them.

Depending on the circumstances, I may have to take my sisters with me.”

“You have sisters?”

After seeing Arche nod, the other three looked at each other again. They did

not say it, but they all felt that perhaps she ought to quit this job.

It was true that workers made more money than adventurers. In turn, the

risks they took were very high. All of them took jobs after ensuring they were

safe, but accidents they could not predict were a frequent occurrence.

If something went wrong, she might end up dying and leaving her sisters

with nobody to count upon. However, everyone felt that they would be

busybodies if they said any more.

“Is that so… then we’ll put your problem aside for now, Arche. We’ll let you

handle that yourself… let’s return to the topic of whether or not to take this

job.”

After saying that, Hekkeran looked coldly at Arche.

“Arche, pardon my bluntness, but you have no say in this.”

“—There’s no need to apologize. It’s fine. I understand that I can’t give a

proper answer, since I’m in debt.”

This was what they called being blinded by greed.

“—Frankly speaking, I’m lucky I haven’t been chased out of the team

already.”

“What are you saying? We’re the lucky ones to have a skilled magic caster

like yourself joining us.”

This was not an empty pleasantry. This was a fact.

Of particular note was her Talent. Those miraculous eyes of hers had saved

Hekkeran and the others countless times.

If one had to name Arche’s Talent, perhaps calling it the Mystic Eyes of

Revelation might be appropriate.

Apparently, all arcane magic casters radiated an invisible aura of magic.

Arche’s Talent allowed her to perceive this aura, and understand which tier of

spells someone could use.

The usefulness of being able to perceive the strength of one’s opposition

needed no explanation.

Hekkeran knew of only one other person in the Empire with a Talent like

Arche’s. That would be the greatest magic caster in the Empire — Fluder

Paradyne.

In other words, by the power of her eyes alone, Arche was in the same league

as the mighty Fluder.

“Still, I can’t believe the Magic Academy would actually let go of such a

talented girl.”

“Indeed, she’s capable of using magic of my tier at this age. For all we know,

she might end up being able to attain the sixth tier.”

“—That would probably be very difficult. However, just knowing that the

possibility exists makes me very happy.”

After the mood had cooled down again, Hekkeran clapped his hands. The

clear, crisp sound got everyone’s attention.

“Now then, shall we or shall we not take this job? — Roberdyck.”

“I think it’ll be fine.”

“Imina?”

“There aren’t any drawbacks to it, right? Besides, we haven’t had proper

work in a long time.”

Workers did not get jobs often. While they had been slaying undead on the

Katze Plains two days ago, that was a regularly scheduled extermination, and it

was not the same as a request from a client.

“Then…”

“—If you’re worried about me, I hope you won’t be that way. I have other

ways to make money even without taking this job.”

The three of them looked at each other, and then Imina smiled thinly.

“As if. Think about it, this job is really good, and the payout’s really

generous. Right, Rober?”

“Exactly. This isn’t for you, but the treasures sleeping in the ruins. Isn’t that

right, Hekkeran?”

“Did you hear that, Arche? The only shame is that we can’t make ourselves

famous by announcing the discovery of the ruins.”

“—Thank you all.”

Arche bowed in thanks, and the three of them smiled as they saw it.

“Now then, come with me to redeem this credit plate for cash, Arche. As for

the two of you, I’ll have to trouble you to help prepare our adventuring gear.”

Adventuring gear included things like rope, oil and magic items. They

required careful checking. The meticulous Roberdyck and Imina with her thief

skills were well-suited to the task. However, the real reason was that Hekkeran

was not suited to doing these things.

“Now then, let’s move. Although… Arche.”

Arche tilted her head, as though to ask “Hm?” Hekkeran spoke the question

that was on his mind.

“Say, will the payment from this job be enough to clear your debts?”

“—It’ll be fine. If I pay this money first, we’ll be able to last a while longer.”

“If it’s not enough, I can lend you some.”

“Yeah, just give it back the next time we get paid.”

They would never say “we’ll pay for you.” That was only to be expected. The

members of Foresight were equals, after all.

“—Permit me to refuse. I believe it is time my parents paid their own debts.

All I can do is give them some time, as an act of filial piety.”

“But of course.”

The four of them looked at each other, and then they began their respective

tasks.

# *3*

# 

# 

# 

This was a certain high-end residential district in the Imperial Capital, whose

sprawling grounds were covered with old yet sturdy and luxurious mansions.

Most of the residents of these venerable, yet most certainly not decrepit homes

were nobles.

A noble’s residence was a status symbol. Anyone who could not bear to spend

the money to pretty up their home would become the laughingstock of noble

society.

Things like accessories, jewelry, clothes, homes and courtyards; all of these

decorative items were military assets on the battlefield known as noble society.

That was because these items were not only a sign of wealth, but also of the

breadth and depth of one’s connections. Living in an austere home was reason

enough for mockery. Therefore, unless they were of a military inclination and

had no interest in political matters, the nobles fought tooth and nail to decorate

themselves and their homes. In other words, it was like a military show of force;

only people with sufficient strength could do such a thing.

If one looked around, one would notice a few things.

This place was in a part of the Imperial Capital with excellent security, and it

was very quiet. However, there was another reason for the silence of the

surrounding region beyond the security. It was also because many of the homes

here did not feel like they were inhabited.

In truth, nobody lived in many of these mansions. They were empty houses,

formerly owned by nobles who had been stripped of their titles by the Bloody

Emperor and had to abandon them after they could not afford the upkeep on

these dwellings.

Amidst this sea of empty residences, one mansion was still inhabited.

However, the outer walls had not been properly maintained, and it would seem

someone had neglected to care for the vegetation in the courtyard.

Arche’s parents received her with stiff expressions in the reception lounge of

this mansion. Their faces displayed the attitudes appropriate to a noble. They

were dressed in superior clothing.

“Oh, you’re back, Arche.”

“You’ve returned.”

Before Arche answered them, her eyes noticed the glass ornament on the

table. It was an exquisitely carved wineglass, and it radiated an air of class and

elegance.

Arche’s face twitched, because she had never seen that item before.

“—That is…?”

“Oh, this is from the renowned artisan Jean…”

“—That’s not what I’m asking. We didn’t have this in the house before, why

do we have it now?”

“That’s because I bought it this morning.”

As she heard her father’s casual tone — like he was discussing today’s weather

— Arche’s body wobbled.

“—How much was it?”

“Oh… I believe it was 15 gold coins. Cheap, no?”

Arche’s head drooped in despair. Anyone would have done the same, if the

debt they had to pay had increased again after they had paid off part of it with

the deposit for the job.

“—Why did you buy it?”

“As nobles, people will laugh at us if we don’t spend money on such things.”

Her father laughed proudly, and Arche could not help glaring at him with

hostility in her eyes.

“—We aren’t nobles anymore.”

Those words made her father’s face stiffen and turn red.

“No!”

Her father pounded his fist on the table with a thump. Fortunately, the guest

room’s table was thick enough that the wineglass barely budged. While Arche

would not have minded it breaking, her father would not have minded either. He

would simply have thought that it was an expense of a mere 15 gold coins.

As Arche tried to suppress her irritation, her father continued spewing curses

and spittle.

“Once that damn idiot dies, we’ll be able to resume our noble status

immediately! We’re nobles who have served as the backbone of the Empire for

over a hundred years! How can he just cast us out like that? This is an investment

for when we regain our status! Besides, this show of strength will show everyone

that we won’t give in to that idiot!”

*What a fool.*

That was Arche’s opinion of her father as he snorted in agitation. “That idiot”

probably referred to the Bloody Emperor, but surely he would not care about a

family that was as insignificant as Arche’s. More to the point, there had to be

better ways to show defiance than this.

He was like a frog in the bottom of a well, who could not see anything outside

it.

Arche shook her head tiredly.

“That’s enough out of the two of you.”

Her mother’s relaxed tones brought about a temporary ceasefire between

Arche and her father.

She then rose to her feet and offered Arche a small bottle.

“Arche, I bought you perfume.”

“—How much did it cost?’

“Three gold coins.”

“Is that so… thank you.”

*A total of 18 gold coins,* Arche calculated in her head as she thanked her mother,

then carefully tucked the bottle and the small amount of fluid inside it into her

pocket.

It was very difficult for Arche to treat her mother coldly. That was because

buying perfume or cosmetics was a very sensible purchase, from a certain point

of view.

Looking pretty, attending classy dinner parties and catching the eye of

wealthy nobles. A woman’s joy was to be married, get pregnant, bear children

and raise them; that was very proper from a noble’s point of view. Investing in

cosmetics for that objective was hardly a mistake.

Even so, she felt that buying perfume was too much when the family was in

such dire straits. More to the point, three gold coins was enough for a plebeian

family to live on for a month.

“—I’ve told you several times, don’t spend recklessly. Only spend the

minimum amount necessary to get by.”

“That’s what I’m trying to tell you! This is a necessary expense!”

Arche tiredly looked at her father, who was so mad that his face was covered

in red spots. They had argued like this several times in the past, and it had ended

inconclusively each time. It was partially Arche’s fault that things had ended up

like this. If she had put her foot down earlier, perhaps things might not have

ended up like this, and she would not have given Foresight trouble.

“—I won’t be bringing money back anymore. I’m taking my sisters and leaving

this house.”

Her father began panting heavily upon hearing her calm voice. *At least he’s*

*smart enough to know what’ll happen to him if nobody brings home the bacon,* Arche

thought coldly.

“Who do you think brought you up so you could live the way you do now?”

“—I’ve more than repaid that kindness.”

Arche’s pronouncement was simple and final. The money she had given to her

parents was a sizable sum. In addition, that money had been earned through

adventures. It was the money that should have been used to become stronger

with her companions. While it was true that everyone was free to spend their

money as they saw fit, there was a tacit understanding that most of it would go

towards strengthening themselves.

What would Arche’s friends think when they saw how she hardly bought new

equipment?

Not strengthening her battle gear meant that she would remain weak forever.

However, the members of Foresight had not said anything to Arche. Arche had

taken their kindness for granted.

Arche turned a burning stare on her father. Under her unyielding gaze, her

father shrank and turned away. That was only to be expected. Arche had walked

the edge of death countless times. She could not possibly lose to a foolish

nobleman.

Arche glanced at her father once more, saw that he did not dare speak again,

and left the room.

She closed the door behind her, and sighed. A voice called out to her, as though

it had been waiting for this moment.

“Young Mistress.”

“—What is it, James?”

It was James, the butler who had served them faithfully over the years. His

wrinkled face was stiff and nervous. Arche immediately realized the reason for

that. That was because he often made that face in the years since her father had

been stripped of his noble status.

“I apologize for having to tell you about this, Young Mistress, but…”

Arche raised a hand to interrupt him. The two of them felt that this was not a

matter that should be discussed in the corridor right outside the receiving room,

and so they went some distance away.

Arche took a leather purse from a hidden pocket and opened up. Several

different colors gleamed there. The most numerous were glints of silver,

followed by those of copper, and the least numerous were those of gold.

“—Will this be enough to tide you over for now?”

James took the purse from her. His expression had softened a little after

seeing the coins within.

“My wage and the money for the traders… I believe it will be enough, Young

Mistress.”

“—Good.”

Arche sighed in relief. While this was just financing a debt, it ought to last for

a while.

“—Couldn’t you stop Father from buying that thing?”

“I could not. The seller came with a noble he knew. I tried to remind the

Master several times, but he still…”

“—I see.”

Both of them sighed.

“—I wish to ask a question. If we terminate everyone we’re employing now,

how much will we need for severance pay?”

James’ eyes went wide, and he smiled glumly. There was no shock in his facial

expression; a sign that he had been prepared for this.

“I understand. I will calculate the amount and report it to you, Young

Mistress.”

“—Please do.”

Just then, the pattering sound of quick footsteps reached her ears. She knew

who had made it even without turning to look.

The thin line of Arche’s mouth softened, and when she turned around, she

saw someone running over. The other party did not slow down, simply ran head-

first into Arche’s arms.

The person who had tackled Arche was a girl less than a meter tall, around five

years old, and the shape of her eyes was very similar to Arche’s. The girl puffed

up her pink cheeks, seemingly very displeased.

“So haaard~”

That was not a criticism of her chest being too flat after throwing herself into

Arche’s embrace.

Her adventurer’s outfit used a lot of leather and provided excellent defensive

strength. The cuirass in particular was made of hardened leather. Surely the girl

must have felt like her face had been flattened when she charged head-first into

it.

“—Does it hurt?”

Arche touched the girl’s face, and caressed her head.

“Mmm, not at all, Onee-sama!”

The little girl smiled happily, and Arche smiled to her sister as well.

“…I shall take my leave, then.”

The butler departed, not wanting to disturb the two of them, and as Arche

watched him go, she patted her sister’s head.

“Ulei… running around in the hallway isn’t…”

Arche swallowed her words halfway. She wanted to say that running around

in the hallways was not befitting of a noble daughter, but Arche had already told

her father that they were not nobles anymore. In that case, what harm did it do

for them to run in the hallway?

Arche’s hand did not stop as she thought, and the girl whose hair had been

ruffled into a mess laughed innocently. Arche looked around, and saw that the

other one had not come with her.

“—Where’s Kuude?”

“In her room!”

“I see… there’s something I’d like to tell you. Let’s go to your room together.”

“Mm.”

Her little sister smiled happily. Protecting that smile was her job. Arche

squeezed her little sister’s petite hand as that powerful emotion gripped her

heart.

Arche could feel the warmth through the hand that was even smaller than

hers.

“Onee-sama, your hand’s so hard.”

Arche looked at her other, empty hand. It had been cut several times during

her adventures, and it was rough and hard, no longer a noblewoman’s hand. But

she did not regret it. Her hands were the proof that she had lived with her friends

— with Foresight.

“But I like them lots!”

Her little sister’s hands closed around her own, and Arche smiled.

“—Thank you.”

# 

●

# 

The North Market of the Imperial Capital was as lively and bustling as always.

However, very few of the average citizenry came here to buy things, so unlike

the packed Central Market, one could browse the stalls as one walked and not

bump into anyone.

Hekkeran and Roberdyck let the tension out of their shoulders as they saw the

familiar sight, and they began window-shopping.

They were relaxed and carefree, as though the word “caution” did not exist in

their minds. This was because there were no pickpockets or thieves in the North

Market — it might well be the safest place in the entire Imperial Capital.

“In any case, what are we buying, Hekkeran?”

“Healing items first. I hope we can get wands of [Cure Light Wounds] for the

sake of our budget. Judging by the circumstances, wands of [Cure Middle

Wounds] are fine too… but buy the ones that are less than half-charged. I hear

we’re going to a tomb, so we might be able to use them on the undead. After that

comes the basic anti-undead essentials, items to resist poison and disease.

Ideally, we’d be able to find some way to deal with negative energy or incorporeal

undead… Permanent items are too expensive, though, so scrolls scribed with the

relevant spells are fine too. However…”

Wands were magic items infused with multiple castings of the same kind of

spell, and they were cheaper than scrolls on a per-cast basis. Therefore, buying

wands of frequently used spells, such as curative magic, was more economical

than scrolls.

“I see. I thought you were planning to buy a gift, and that you asked me to

accompany you to hear my opinion.”

“A gift?”

“…It’s nothing. Hekkeran. Put some effort into finding something good.”

“…Er, mm.”

Almost everything sold in this market was junk.

For the most part, the displays were simply a bunch of items on a thin board.

Few of them were new goods too; all of them looked like old or beat-up second-

hand goods.

Almost all the traders here looked like they could fight, complete with bulging

biceps. That, or they were dressed like magic casters who looked better suited

for battle than bargaining.

At a glance, they looked like bodyguards, but the truth was that they were the

bosses of their stalls. However, they were only bosses for today. They made their

living as adventurers or Workers. In other words, they were in the same business

as Hekkeran and Roberdyck.

What they sold here were items they had used before, or items they had

discovered during their adventures, but which their party members could not

use. In that case, rather than sell them to a dedicated magical item dealer or the

Magician’s Guild, it would be better to find clients themselves and save

themselves the expense of a middleman in the process. This approach offered

many benefits to both buyer and seller. Even after factoring in the costs of

paying the Merchants’ Guild to set up a stall, they could still make a profit.

For that reason, many adventurers and Workers like Hekkeran and his ilk

would come to this place to look for hidden treasures. Some people even came

here every day during their stay in the Imperial Capital in search of a good deal.

This was also the reason why there was little crime in the North Market. Who

on earth would try something on all the combat veterans here?

The two of them browsed the stalls for a while. They were not gloomy, but

neither were they glad.

“I’ve got nothing.”

“Me neither.”

All the items on sale here were items which Hekkeran and the others did not

need or which they could not use. Perhaps if the two of them were low-level

adventurers or freshly started Workers, they might be something they could use,

but unfortunately, there was nothing that the pair — or even their colleagues —

wanted to buy.

“What a shame, maybe it would be faster if we went to a regular store.”

“Well, we were just bargain-hunting here anyway, it can’t be helped if we can’t

find anything. Ah well, humble scrimping like this is how you get your savings

started.”

“Savings, huh… Hekkeran, what do you think’s going to happen?”

“If I could understand what you meant just from that, I could be a super high-

tier magic caster… do you mean Arche?”

“So you did get it after all.”

“Well, I grew more confident as you went on talking.”

“So you know what I’m trying to say?”

“…You’re trying to say that this might be our last adventure, right?”

“Please don’t phrase it in such an inauspicious way,” Roberdyck smiled

bitterly. “Still, it’s not too far off the mark. Arche said she was taking her sisters

away to raise them on her own. That being the case, coming out to adventure

again will be difficult.”

“Yeah. She’ll make good use of her talents or find some job where she can

make money without adventuring.”

“Finding work won’t be hard. She’s a third-tier magic caster. While I don’t

know how many people there are in her family — how many sisters she has,

rather — she ought to be able to support three or four people.”

“Mm, I think so too. That’s why she could come out and say that she could

raise them on her own.”

“In that case, we’re the ones who’ll have the problem. Once Arche-san the

wizard leaves our team, who should we get to fill the hole in the group?”

“Perhaps we’ll be lucky and stumble across a third-tier arcane magic caster

somebody left by the roadside?”

“Do your dreaming on the bed, please… If we were adventurers, we could ask

the Guild to put out feelers for us… but if we’re looking for one on our own, it’s

all down to luck.”

The two of them looked at each other and then sighed in unison.

There were times when one lost a friend, when a friend could not keep up with

the group, or when one’s strength exceeded that of the other members of the

group. In these situations, an adventurer or a Worker would leave their team. It

was hardly a rare situation. Rather, actually staying with the same team

throughout one’s career was the rarity; for the most part everyone would change

teams two or three times.

Hekkeran, Roberdyck and Imina were the same way.

However, even if that was the case, that did not mean they could easily find

an arcane magic caster — and one capable of casting third-tier spells — who was

also a Worker without a team.

“How about letting a second-tier caster join and then training him up?”

“That ought to be the last resort. I’d rather avoid that if at all possible.”

“Headhunting will be hard too. People who become Workers usually have

some sort of personality defect, and just grabbing someone off the road to join

us will be bad if it leads to problems down the road. Like say, if they’re battle

maniacs or something.”

“…From that point of view, we’re practically a miracle.”

“Ultimately, our team simply does it for money, which is a rarity. Well, Arche

joined after hearing the rumors about us, so she’s kind of an exception.”

“When Arche-san came, we were thinking about who to get as our last

member.”

Roberdyck gazed off into the distance. Hekkeran felt that he probably had a

similar expression on his own face.

“I still remember what I was drinking back then… Arche-san came at just the

right time. It even made me feel like the gods were telling us to form the team.”

“Oh, that’s amazing, my memory isn’t that clear. So what were you drinking

back then, Rober?”

“Water.”

“Isn’t that the same as what you always drink… you really are a teetotaler.

Still, it would be troublesome if you drank as much as Imina did.”

“It can’t be helped, I just don’t drink alcohol. Of course, Imina-san’s bad taste

in alcohol is a problem of its own…”

“Ahh, well, you’re the sort who changes color from red to blue and then white

the moment you down a cup of wine. If not for that antidote spell, I have no idea

how the first time you drank would have gone.”

“Maybe I wouldn’t be here now, but someone else. People have died of alcohol

poisoning before,” Roberdyck shrugged. “But back to the topic. If Arche-san

leaves, what do you plan to do? Is it possible that you might dissolve the team?”

“…If we can’t get enough members together, then we won’t have a choice.

Adventuring with three people is just too dangerous… or do you want to go back

to being an adventurer?”

“I don’t want to go back to those days of begging the temples for permission

to save someone. I’d rather retire instead.”

“Retirement, huh… that might not be a bad thing.”

“I’ve got a sum of money saved up, and I hope I can find my way into a job

where I can help the weak and become a source of strength for others. Maybe I

could go to a frontier village and be a part-time priest as I plow the fields. How

about you, Hekkeran?”

“I haven’t decided yet.”

The corner of Roberdyck’s mouth curled up.

“…It might not be good to decide on your own.”

Hekkeran did not understand the meaning of Roberdyck’s words for a

moment. In the end, he finally understood what the other man was getting at,

and Hekkeran’s face twitched.

“—Why you!”

“Kuku,” he smiled evilly. “You thought I hadn’t noticed?”

“Ahhhhhhh~! It’s not like that, I wasn’t hiding it from everyone on purpose!

Think about it, I just couldn’t find the right time to tell you guys, right… so that’s

what you meant by the gift.”

“Who confessed first?”

“Oi, Rober! Look over there.”

Hekkeran was pointing at a pair of people who were inspecting the

merchandise within a luxurious tentage.

One of them was a warrior in jet-black armor. A crimson cape descended from

behind him, and there were a pair of greatswords crossed at his back.

“That was a sudden change of topic… alright, so be it. I’ll ask you about it later.

Hmm, his equipment looks top-notch; if he’s as good as his gear, then he ought

to be a mighty warrior indeed. Is that someone you know with new weapons or

armor?”

“I’m not sure, but I have the feeling I’ve never seen that person in the Imperial

Capital before. I mean, do you see that girl beside him? I think he’s blocking her.

I’ve never seen her before.”

“Yeah, the angle was bad, so I didn’t see her. So, who’s prettier, between her

and Imina-san?”

“—Enough of that! How am I supposed to answer that question?! …Though

frankly speaking, that girl there is prettier.”

“Imina-san is a beauty in her own right! And of course, they do say that one’s

beloved is the fairest in one’s eyes, so if even you think that way, Hekkeran… I

see, the two of them are travelers, or adventurers from foreign parts. They might

also be a team that’s just shifted their base of operations to the Imperial

Capital.”

“Still, they’re buying daily-use magic items, isn’t that strange?”

The luxurious-looking tent was festooned with all sorts of magic items.

However, those items were not the kind which adventurers or Workers would

use, but rather, they were items intended for use in daily living. For instance, a

box that generated cold temperatures within itself and kept food fresh, or a fan

that could create air currents to keep people cool.

Many of these items had been innovated 200 years ago, by a Minotaur known

as the All-Talk Sage.

That warrior came up with ideas for all sorts of devices, but he did not have

the ability to make them, and he could not explain why these items had to look

the way they did or what principles drove them, hence his nickname.

However, the man himself was an absolutely top-notch warrior, who had left

a whole slew of unbelievable tales behind him, such as the ability to call forth

hurricanes with a swing of his axe or create earthquakes by slamming it into the

ground and so on. In addition, he had become famous by elevating the status of

humanoid races from food to slaves within the Minotaur nation.

The fact that adventurers — who typically lived in inns — would actually take

an interest in these daily use magic items which had been designed by such a

demi-human, was quite unusual.

“It’s not like it’s that strange. The Empire’s magical technology is quite

advanced, and these items are cheaper than in other nations. They’re probably

thinking that it’ll be worthwhile to bring them home, even if it does take a bit

more effort.”

“Ah, I see. Yeah, that’s definitely possible.”

“It’s weird from our point of view, but if you consider it from a traveler’s

perspective, it’s hardly strange.”

“Mm, indeed. From that angle, I can understand why they’re picking them out

so seriously.”

The armored warrior seemed to be carefully fiddling with the magic item. He

opened and close the doors, picked it up and then turned it over. One could

almost see the sweat forming on the salesman’s forehead.

“We should probably shop for our stuff as earnestly as he does.”

“You have a point.”



# Chapter 2 Butterflies Caught in a Spider’s Web

Chapter 2 | Butterflies Caught in a Spider’s Web

## 

## 

## 

## 

# 

# *1*

# 

# 

# 

The sun had not yet risen, but there were already quite a number of Workers

gathered in the Count’s courtyard. The last people to arrive were Hekkeran and

the members of Foresight, for a total of 18 people. All of the people gathered for

this job were capable Workers within the Imperial Capital.

Each team kept a fixed distance from the others, and at the same time they

sized each other up warily, so the fact that every single eye went to the members

of Foresight as they arrived last was quite an intimidating sight.

“Ah, there’s a few familiar faces. Speaking of which, didn’t we meet that stag

beetle at the Katze Plains?”

“Strange, didn’t I mention it at the inn? Gringam’s team was hired too… what,

I didn’t tell you? I have the feeling that I brought it up… in any case, as you can

see, all the notable Workers in the Empire are gathered under one roof! A warm

round of applause for our client’s ample finances!”

“We can dispense with the applause, I think. Let’s leave that aside for now;

the ones over there should be the team leaders.”

Everyone present was divided into their teams, and among them, a group of

three people were discussing information.

“Gringam’s there too, right. Okay, I’ll go over to say hi.”

“…Ah! Ugeh, that bastard’s here too? Ah! Seriously? Then, those elf girls must

be… this is terrible. Die, you son of a bitch.”

Imina muttered bitterly to herself. She might have been keeping her voice

down, but Hekkeran and the others still panicked as they surveyed their

surroundings for signs of hostility.

“Imina-san!”

“I know, Rober. He’s a colleague for the duration of this job, after all… but I

just wish I didn’t have to see his face.”

“—I don’t like him either.”

“Ah, if you want to talk about whether or not we like him, then I hate him too,

but you need to mind your attitude.”

A look of “you’re really annoying” came over Imina’s face. Hekkeran came

between her and Roberdyck, then smiled mischievously as he shrugged.

“…Hey, I’m going over to greet him. Don’t say annoying things like that. What

if I end up showing it on my face?”

“Work hard, leader.”

After hearing Roberdyck cheer him on, Hekkeran deliberately scrunched up

his face and grumbled, “those two talk like it doesn’t concern them,” and then

went over to the group of three people.

The first to greet Hekkeran as he walked over was a Worker in a suit of steel-

colored full plate armor. Due to the strange, rounded structure of the plates and

the curiously oversized pauldrons, he did not look like a human being so much

as a beetle standing on two legs.

A large horn stuck straight out of his helmet, a sign that he was deliberately

cultivating that image.

However, the part after that was not intentional. The man’s legs were very

short, so he looked like a stag beetle that a child had deliberately forced to stand

on its hind legs. A nicer way of putting it would be to say that his short, stumpy

legs stood securely upon the ground, and he had a Dwarven physique that was

well-suited to being a warrior.

“As I expected, thou cam’st too, Hekkeran.”

“Yes, Gringam. I thought the terms this time round weren’t too bad.”

Hekkeran waved to the other two people. His attitude was hardly dignified,

but neither of them looked unhappy. This was because the four of them might

have been of different ages and had different experiences, but they were equally

skilled as Workers.

“So, your guys…” Hekkeran glanced at Gringam’s team and counted them

before replying: “There’s only five of you; what happened to the other

members?”

“They are taking their rest, and alleviating their fatigue. In addition, they

worked the same assignment as myself, and now they must repair or replace

their damaged or destroyed panoply.”

This man — Gringam — led the team called Heavy Masher, a large Worker

team with 14 members.

There were merits in having numbers on one’s side. One of them was the

ability to approach a job from many different angles, which gave one many ways

to handle a job. In particular, the ability to recombine into a team that could take

on any request was a great boon.

However, that approach also contained demerits. One of them was the fact

that payment was divided among the number of people, and so each individual

would be paid less. The second flaw was that deciding something would take a

very long time, which led to slow movements.

After adding up the pros and cons, the fact that this man could group up

Workers and their tendency to break apart based on personality conflicts, and

then go one step further to perfectly control them was a sign of his great skill as

a manager.

“Oh~ That’s tough. Although… why don’t you act as our support, so the friends

you left behind won’t end up hating you for earning too much?”

“Utter foolery. As a leader in mine own right, the task falls to me to assuage

the underlings once the task is concluded. Regretfully, our band must seek the

best possible outcome for ourselves.”

“Oi, oi, don’t be like that. I’m just saying that it’ll be fine if you speak normally

around us.”

Gringam smiled thinly. Hekkeran saw that he did not agree, and so he

shrugged and turned to the other man.

“This is the first time I’ve spoken face to face with you.”

He extended a hand to the other man as a show of respect, and that man took

it. His was a sturdy and strong hand.

His narrowed eyes flickered, then focused on Hekkeran.

“—Foresight. I’ve heard of you.”

His voice was as clear as a bell. One could say it fit his appearance very well.

“You too, Tenbu.”

There was nobody who did not know of this genius swordsman, who was

undefeated in the arena. This man’s team — Tenbu — was essentially a team

composed of one man, to some extent. However, that was also why Imina’s face

contorted with disgust.

“I’m glad to be able to team up with a sword genius who can rival the mightiest

warrior of the Kingdom — the great Gazef Stronoff.”

“Thank you. However, shouldn’t you say that he can rival me — Eruya

Uzruth?”

“Oh~ bold words~”

Eruya smiled coldly, an arrogant look on his face. After seeing his expression,

Hekkeran blinked several times to hide the emotion he had nearly revealed.

“Well then, I look forward to seeing your swordsmanship on full display in the

ruins.”

“Yes. You can leave that to me. I hope there’ll be a monster in those ruins who

can give me a challenge.”

Eruya patted the weapon at his side.

“…We don’t know what kind of monster may emerge. For all we know, we

might even encounter a Dragon!”

“Now that would be a frightening sight. Perhaps a powerful monster like a

Dragon might challenge me. However, I’ll win in the end.”

“Really now,” Hekkeran smiled, albeit on the surface. He glanced to see the

reaction of the last person, and worked to suppress his own feelings.

He recalled a rumor going around that in swordsmanship alone, Eruya was

more than a match even for an orichalcum-ranked adventurer, so perhaps that

answer of his was no idle boast. In addition, confidence in his own abilities was

a good thing; bragging was very important for Workers.

Of course, that was as long as he did not take it too far.

Dragons were the mightiest species on the world.

They soared through the sky and expelled ruinous breath from their maws.

Their scales were sturdy and their physical attributes were extraordinary. Old

Dragons could even use magic. They possessed a lifespan incomparable to those

of human beings, and even a sage would have to admit defeat to their

accumulated wisdom.

Due to their power, stories frequently depicted them as wicked foes, or beings

who lent a hand to heroes. The objective of the Thirteen Heroes’ last adventure

was the Dragon known as the Divine Dragon. In much the same way, the final

adversary of a hero was often one of the Draconic race.

It was quite startling how he could compare himself to such a powerful being

and act so cockily, even if it was idle banter. His swaggering tone sounded like

he was joking, but unfortunately Eruya’s eyes were serious. How full of himself

was he?

Nobody knew what sort of monsters lay within the ruins they would soon be

visiting. He predicted that Eruya’s mental state was very dangerous and might

end up dragging down everybody else as well. That ought to be the case.

*I’d better stay away from him.*

It was his own business if he wanted to die, but it would be troublesome if he

came over to beg for help. Hekkeran smiled to him, and having made that

decision, he amended his approach to Eruya; now he would be “used and then

discarded.”

“And the people over there should be the members of Foresight. Oya…”

A look of disdain and scorn filled Eruya’s eyes the moment he saw Imina.

Apparently, Eruya had been born in the religious nation that revered

humanity as the greatest of all races; the Slaine Theocracy. The citizens of that

country often viewed people with nonhuman ancestry as second-class citizens.

From that man’s point of view, having a Half-Elf like Imina working on an

even basis with him must be very upsetting.

*That part of him lends truth to the rumors… however, if he really was born in the*

*Theocracy, then he ought to have a baptismal name. There’s also a rumor that he*

*abandoned his baptismal name.*

Hekkeran grumbled in his heart, and just to be sure, he muttered:

“Oi oi, hands off my buddies, okay?”

“Of course. For the duration of this job, we are all comrades. I will work

together with you.”

“I would very much like to believe those words.”

This man Eruya was like a strong kid who had directly become an adult. He

unnerved others; or rather, he was mentally unbalanced to some extent. The

mood around him was distasteful to others, and even after reminding him,

Hekkeran could not find it in himself to relax.

“Oh yes, please believe me. Now then, let’s return to the previous topic. In

any event, I’d like to turn overall command of the expeditions to someone else.

Provided it’s not too troubling, I will obey the instructions of all the other

members. Feel free to use me as a vanguard during battle; I will cut down all the

foes before us with this blade.”

“Alright, understood.”

“…In that case, I’ll be returning to my team. Let me know if there’s anything.”

Eruya bowed, and then left.

As he saw the women waiting for Eruya, Hekkeran’s face twisted for a

moment. However, he could not let his feelings be written on his face. Allowing

others to know how he felt might occasionally prove disadvantageous, and

someone like that was not fit to lead a team.

He quelled his emotions, and hid his expression.

He turned away, like he had seen something filthy, and greeted the last person.

“Greetings, honored elder. You’re as healthy as ever.”

“Hoi, Hekkeran. You seem well.”

He wheezed whenever he spoke, because almost all his front teeth had fallen

out.

He was Palpatra “Green Leaf” Ogrion.

The source of his nickname was the suit of armor he wore, which resembled

green leaves glistening with morning dew. That armor was not made of metal,

but the scales of a Green Dragon. Palpatra and his team had once succeeded in a

Dragon Hunt. Of course, it was not a very big Dragon, but even a small Dragon

was not a foe which an average Worker or adventurer could handle.

Palpatra was an old man who was in his 80th year of life.

Usually, people in this line of work retired after the age of 45. There were also

some who would retire in their early forties. Very few people remained as

adventurers after the age of 50. The people who worked such a cruel job where

death was a very real danger could not ignore the effects of age withering their

bodies.

In truth, Palpatra was an exception, but his strength had deteriorated greatly

from when he was in his prime — apparently, when he had reached the level of

the orichalcum-ranked. Even so, Palpatra refused to step down from the

frontlines.

Palpatra and the way he continued adventuring despite his advanced age was

an object of admiration for many people in the field.

“Mhm, still, he seems a little dangerous.”

Even more wrinkles appeared on Palpatra’s already-wrinkled face, and he

lowered his voice, a gesture of which Hekkeran approved.

“Yes. If he wants to die, that’s his problem, but I’d rather not go down with

him as well.”

“Granted, he is very strong, but excessive confidence might end up

endangering his compatriots. He is extremely dangerous.”

Gringam seemed to be muttering something along the lines of “how

troublesome.” After seeing Eruya’s attitude probably all the workers were

thinking the same thing.

“Actually, how strong is he? I haven’t been to the arena in a while.”

“Know’st thou not? I am aware… is it not the same for thee, revered elder?”

“I’ve only heard of his prowess, but I haven’t actually seen it with my own

eyes. Perhaps I could ask my companions. However, when we get down to it,

what are we going to use as a benchmark for strength? For instance, if we used

Gazef Stronoff as an upper limit, then where would something we were more

familiar with… like say… the Empire’s Four Knights stand on that scale?”

“The Knights who are also known as ‘Heavy Explosion,’ ‘The Immovable,’

‘Lightning Bolt’ and ‘Violent Gale,’ huh… using them as a benchmark only

complicates things. The four of them ought to be inferior to that great man —

to the Kingdom’s Warrior-Captain — but then, the days of Gazef Stronoff

towering over the common herd are a thing of the past. As time goes by, new

powerful warriors will emerge.”

“So you want to say Uzruth is one of them, that he’s really that strong?

Besides, I’ve never seen the power of the Four Knights up close… the strongest

person I’ve seen is probably the leader of the Platinum Imperial Guard, who

answer directly to the Emperor himself. That man’s skill is quite something… as

I recall, he’s on par with the Four Knights?”

“The mightiest entities I know of are the Dragon Lords of the Council

Alliance. Humanity cannot defeat foes like those.”

“Some say there’s five of them, others say there’s seven… Ah, we’re looking

for a way to gauge Uzruth’s strength. Please limit yourself to human

swordsmen.”

“That said the Argland Council Alliance’s swordsmen are almost all demi-

humans, so we’ll have to count them out as well. The Martial Lord of the arena

is the same way. Then I’ll cite the lady paladin of the Roble Holy Kingdom, who

wields a holy sword. That said, she does seem somewhat inadequate in terms of

pure swordsmanship.”

Collecting information on mighty individuals was very important for a

Worker, when it came to handling jobs. That was because the presence or

absence of such information often determined victory or defeat. And of course,

that aside, they were all warriors, and they could not help but want to know more

about people who inhabited the world of martial arts with them.

It was the same now. The conversation had started by discussing Eruya’s

strength, but things had gotten more and more heated, and it became something

like a swap meet for news about powerful beings. It was like a group of kids

arguing about who was strongest.

“The Slaine Theocracy’s people tend to be of a uniformly high level, but I

haven’t heard of any particularly outstanding individuals among them. Then

again, even if they were, divine magic casters are outside the scope of this

discussion.”

“I heard there’s a female warrior in the Kingdom’s highest-ranked adventurer

team. What of her?”

“Ah, the “no breasts, just pecs” one, am I right? She’s very strong. Although, I

heard that she lost a duel with the Warrior-Captain.”

“…I heard an adventurer addressed her with that made-up nickname and got

beaten half to death. Hahaha, what a frightening young lady.”

“After mentioning the names of the strong, I’ve come to realize that there

aren’t many powerful pure swordsmen. There’s Dark Knight of the Heroes of the

City-State Alliance. Then there’s ‘Fierce Flash’ Cerebrate of the Draconic

Kingdom’s adamantite-ranked adventurer team Crystal Tear, as well as

‘Crimson’ Optics of the Worker team Blazing Inferno, and then the Kingdom’s…

Brain Unglaus.”

The conversation stopped here for the first time.

“Brain Unglaus? Who’s he?”

Palpatra directed that puzzled question at Gringam.

“Dost thou not know, revered elder? That man is a famed swordsman of the

Kingdom… what about thee?”

Hekkeran shook his head in response to that question. He had never heard

that name before.

“Verily, all of thee know not…”

Gringam could not hide the look of disappointment on his face. Then, he

spoke in a voice that lacked confidence, like he was perusing memories of the

past:

“This is a matter of years gone by, when I once took part in the Kingdom’s

grand martial tournament. During the semi-finals, I had the privilege of

measuring his blade skills a measure. At that time, mine abilities could not hope

to compare to his.”

“You’re talking about the tournament which Gazef Stronoff won, right?”

“Indeed. In the end, Unglaus met defeat at Stronoff’s hands, but the battle of

those contenders was truly a sight to behold. They were paragons of

swordsmanship both; how did he deflect that flash of light? And being able to

strike with but a single curve of the blade under those circumstances… mine eyes

were opened upon witnessing such sights and more.”

Given the way Gringam was gushing with praise for him, and the fact that he

could fight evenly with Gazef Stronoff, the mightiest warrior of the surrounding

nations, it was clear that his strength must have been top rate.

So it was just that he did not know that the world contained such skilled

exponents. Hekkeran was filled with awe.

“Mhm… then, who do you think is stronger, between that Unglaus chap and

Uzruth.”

“Uzruth,” Gringam answered without any delay. “If he had to battle Unglaus

from the grand martial tournament, it would definitely be him. I witnessed a

fight of his in the arena recently, and I am certain of it,”

“So that means he can stand on par with the Warrior-Captain from several

years ago? Is he really that strong? Oh my.”

Hekkeran had exclaimed in a moment of excitement, and he hurriedly lowered

his volume.

“I see, Unglaus, is it. Looks like I’ll have to pay attention to news from the

Kingdom… alright, have you two heard of it? That there’s a third adamantite-

ranked adventurer team in the Kingdom?”

“Of course I have.”

“Ah, pardon me, I haven’t.”

“Hekkeran… ignorance will endanger thy team.”

“I know that, but I just don’t have the money to gather information about our

friends in the Kingdom. I can’t spare the cash.”

“Hyahyahya, how bold! I do not dislike such courage!”

“Revered elder, I seek your opinion on a certain matter. Having heard the

rumors of Darkness’ Momon, do you not feel they are far too exaggerated? They

say the two of them slew a Gigant Basilisk, without the aid of a healer.”

“Uwah, it ought to be just a rumor.”

Such a mighty foe (a Gigant Basilisk) could not be felled by just two people,

not even if they were adamantite-ranked.

“Thou agree’st with me then, Hekkeran? The more news I gather, the more

dubious the provenance of such. It has even reached mine ears that during the

great uproar in the Kingdom, he dispatched a fiend of well over 200 difficulty in

but a single blow. To me, that might be a fabrication concocted by the

Adventurer’s Guild of the Kingdom to frighten those within and without the

nation, and thus they granted those people the rank of adamantite.”

“That’s possible. After all, the birth of a high-ranking adventurer is a

momentous occasion. Still, would the Guild tell such lies? The Guild is quite

stubborn about the way they do things.”

“The Guildmaster of each city handles things differently. The Guildmaster

from my adventuring days was filth. So I punched him right in the face!

Hyahyahya! I’m a Worker now, thanks to that!”

Palpatra laughed loudly and with good cheer.

His reasons for becoming an adventurer were well known. Anyone in the

business within the Imperial Capital would have heard of it. Palpatra would

repeatedly recount the incident whenever he sat down to drink.

“That said, I feel the Guild wouldn’t do something like that.”

“So you think it’s true, then?”

“It’s hard to believe. Even if you viewed it in the most generous terms, a

difficulty of 200… that number alone is suspicious; any foe who was that

powerful could not possibly be felled in a single blow. I think that part was an

exaggeration that was deliberately spread. If an extremely high-difficulty demon

really did show up, they probably engaged it with multiple teams and then had

Darkness deal it the finishing blow.”

“That sounds more likely.”

“Well, if you counted all the adventurers who were stronger than orichalcum-

rank as being adamantite-rank, I could believe such a mighty warrior existed.

After all, adamantite rank can cover a very broad range.”

“Hekkeran and I are of one mind, but thou feel’st it is true, do you not, revered

elder?”

“Hyahyahya. I don’t consider it to be entirely true either.”

“Seeing is believing, as they say. I wish we could meet the man himself… then

again, maybe not.”

Just as the other two were expressing their agreement with Hekkeran, they

heard the sound of flesh striking flesh, followed by a woman trying to bite back

a scream of pain.

All the Workers present turned their eyes onto the same spot. Several of them

had already lowered themselves into battle-ready stances, believing something

had happened.

The source of the scream lay before Eruya — one of his female companions,

who lay upon the ground. Judging by the circumstances, Eruya had probably

punched her. The woman looked up at Eruya’s face, which was twisted in anger.

Her own face was filled with fear as she begged pathetically for forgiveness.

Hekkeran fought back a rising wave of nausea, and a thought flashed through

his mind. He hurriedly turned his attention towards his companion — Imina.

Just as he had imagined, her face had gone blank. There was a dangerous air

around her, as though she would launch an attack if things went any further.

Hekkeran hurriedly signaled to Roberdyck and Arche who were standing

beside her, telling them to hold her back.

Personally speaking, Hekkeran was as angry as Imina was. However, he could

not stick his nose into the problems of other teams. Of course, he could do so if

he wanted. However, if he did, he would need to be prepared to bear all the

consequences of that choice. That was the reason why the other teams simply

wrinkled their brows in displeasure, but none of them made a move.

Imina’s reason eventually overcame her desire to fight, and she spat on the

ground after directing a lewd gesture at his back.

“…The only thing he has that’s comparable to the Kingdom’s Warrior-Captain

is his swordsmanship. It would be wonderful if his character were similar to his

as well, but I guess that’s too much to ask for. Alright, we’ll stop here for now.”

“…Indeed. Since Hekkeran’s here too, let’s decide the most important thing.”

“That man refused, so who’ll be our overall leader?”

The three of them fell silent.

There were four teams present here. While all of them possessed ample

fighting power, without someone to coordinate and lead everyone, they would

not be able to take effective action. It was like having many arms but being

unable to use them all at the same time; little different from only having one.

Being able to make effective use of a team of strong personalities was not an

easy task, and doing so without complaints from anybody was even more

difficult. If the instructions resulted in failure, or if others thought that one was

placing their own team’s gain above their own, it would incur the wrath of the

other teams.

Frankly speaking, the position demanded excellent skills, yet there were more

demerits than merits to taking it.

Every team leader understood that point, so they all remained silent while

watching each other’s faces. Each of them wanted to dump this burden onto the

first person to open their mouth. After about a minute’s silence, Hekkeran

tiredly suggested:

“Honestly, we don’t need an overall leader, do we?”

“That’s just delaying the inevitable. It’ll be troublesome once fighting breaks

out.”

“…Mine idea is that we should alternate. That way resentment will not accrue.

I feel we may discuss the matter at greater length upon reaching the ruins.”

“Ah~”

“You do have a point.”

Both of them approved of Gringam’s suggestion.

“In that case, we’ll go in order of when we arrive there.”

“How about Uzruth and his Tenbu?”

“It’s fine if we skip that punk. Besides, he won’t be able to do it.”

“I agree, revered elder. Then, as the one who proposed it, my Heavy Masher

shall take the lead.”

“I’m counting on you, Gringam.”

“Please do, young man.”

“Understood. That said, there will hardly be any vicious monsters within the

Empire. The problem lies within the Kingdom; a situation may arise once we

draw near the great forest.”

“Ahhh~ If I’d known I’d have reversed the order.”

Hekkeran made a show of grabbing his head in mock regret, while the other

two smiled quietly. After that, they immediately quelled their facial expressions

and turned to look at a man who was walking towards the Workers. The

surrounding Workers had already turned to face him.

The Count’s butler walked proudly through the courtyard that was dimly lit

by the brightening sky, with a pose that befitted a servant of a Count.

He arrived before the Workers, and bowed. Nobody responded to it, but he

did not mind; instead opening his mouth and saying:

“It is time. My thanks to everyone for accepting my Lord’s request. We shall

dispatch two drivers with you and six adventurers as an escort. The objective is

an unexplored ruin within the Kingdom — very likely to be a tomb, from the

structure of it. The duration of the expedition will be three days, and the bonus

will be awarded based on what my master learns, so we will arrange later on. Are

there any questions?”

The butler had said the same thing as the employment request; the only

difference was probably the presence of adventurers as bodyguards.

They wanted to know how the Count had learned about the ruins, but the

Workers knew which questions could be answered and which questions could

not. If their employer was willing to tell them, then he would have said so when

hiring them.

Besides, if this job was really so clear-cut and aboveboard, adventurers could

take care of it. Since it was dirty work, the employer had to keep quiet, and so

not asking would be safer.

“…In that case, I shall take you all to your awaiting carriages.”

Nobody objected, and so everyone followed behind him.

Hekkeran and the rest of Foresight were at the end of the group.

“That fucking son of a bitch, why isn’t he dead yet? How about it, want to kill

him?”

Imina could not tolerate Eruya, and she whispered her displeasure into

Hekkeran’s ear the moment she was beside him, in order to vent her anger.

Her voice was very soft; there was no telling if it was because she was utterly

furious or because she was trying to restrain herself. Hekkeran did not know,

and could only hope it was the latter.

“I’ve heard it before, but he really is a crude man.”

“—He’s absolutely disgusting.”

The other two replied quietly, making no attempt to hide their displeasure.

It was only natural that Foresight would think that way. With a woman like

Imina as their companion, there was no way they could tolerate Eruya’s actions.

Aside from Eruya himself, the rest of his team was all female, and they were

all Elves.

Imina and the other team members would not have been revolted by him if

that was all. However, there was a reason why they had the unanimous and

unreserved opinion that Eruya was a piece of disgusting filth.

The Elf girls were minimally equipped with crudely made gear. In addition,

their short-cut hair exposed their long elven ears, which had been cut in half at

the middle.

The reason why Eruya’s team members were like this was because they were

all Elven slaves from the Slaine Theocracy.

The previous system of slavery in the Empire had undergone a great reform

under the previous Emperor. They were still slaves in name, but their situation

was completely different. However, just like the demi-humans in the arena, the

conditions of some slaves had not been improved.

The Elf slaves Eruya had in tow belonged to that type.

The three nations of the Baharuth Empire, the Re-Estize Kingdom and the

Slaine Theocracy were almost all human, and they discriminated more heavily

against other races than the other surrounding nations. Thus, even humanoid

species — like Half-Elves and Elves — had a hard time living in these countries.

Only the Dwarves were an exception. The Azerlisian Mountain Range that

stood between the Kingdom and the Empire contained a Dwarven Kingdom, and

due to the trading relationship the Empire had with the Dwarves, they were

assured of protection under the law.

“I feel sorry for the Elves. However, we should not try to save them now.”

Imina sighed heavily. She understood that fact in her head; her heart was

simply taking longer to catch up.

“Let’s go.”

Imina moved to the head of the group after that quiet reply, and the others

quickened their pace so as not to fall behind. Then, their eyes all went wide in

surprise.

There were two large, covered carriages waiting at the place where the butler

had taken them, which would be heading for the ruins. There was also a group

of people helping to load their luggage onto the carriages. Those ought to be the

adventurers that the butler mentioned, because the metal plates around their

necks glinted with a golden light.

However, what surprised them was not the adventurers, but the horses

pulling the carriages.

“—Sleipnirs,” someone exclaimed in surprise.

The eight-legged Sleipnirs were larger than an average horse and possessed

excellent physical strength, stamina and mobility. Some people considered them

to be the ideal creature for land travel.

Naturally, they commanded a startling price as well. Most nobles could not

afford a mount that cost five times as much as a warhorse.

Yet, there were two two-horse carriages before them, for a total of 4 Sleipnirs.

Their employer must have considered the risk of losing them during

adventuring, and so his determination was very admirable. Or could it be he felt

that they would unearth so much treasure that only Sleipnirs would be able to

move them?

Everyone was probably thinking the same thing. The sound of swallowing

came from somewhere.

“Please use these carriages. Your rations and other supplies are inside the

vehicle compartment. In addition, we have hired adventurers to protect the

carriage and your campsite. According to their contract, they cannot enter the

ruins, so please keep that in mind.”

Hekkeran realized that there was something which needed to be resolved

right away, and so he left his companions and ran to Gringam.

“Pardon me, Gringam, I need to discuss something with you.”

“What troubles thee that thou seek’st my counsel?”

“When it comes to allocating carriages, could you put us separately from

Tenbu?”

“Hm? Ah, I see. Thy concerns are known to me; thou fear’st for that young

lady, hm? In that case, we shall travel with Tenbu.”

“Sorry, and thanks. You’re a big help.”

“Pay it no heed; in this endeavor, we are comrades. A quarrel even before

reaching the ruins would be a thorny matter, and I too am…”

“—Are you sure we’ll be fine with these puny gold-ranked adventurers? I don’t

want to come back to a wrecked camp or wake up to find myself sharing it with

monsters!”

A great shout came with all the force of a fireball. Two people stared at each

other, and tensions were running high.

Eruya expressed his dissatisfaction to the butler, but he did not make any

attempt to lower his volume. The adventurers stopped moving their luggage, as

though time had stopped.

When one looked up, one could see higher realms ahead. Whether or not one

could reach those heights remained to be seen. Yet, some people continued

marching toward their goal, one step at a time, and Eruya’s statement was very

displeasing to those people. They were engaged in a struggle to prove their

strength, and once their competency was called into question — especially if

their client doubted their ability — it would affect future tasks that they were

assigned. In that case, they had to prove their worth in a simple and quick

fashion.

This man, whose words could not be tolerated by either the adventurers or

the Workers, did not know how to consider things from the perspective of

others. Therefore, he was virtually unaffected by the foul mood in the air, and

continued babbling to himself.

“No, I do understand that they’re fit to handle our luggage, I’m simply

concerned that they won’t be able to help us get rid of threats.”

*Give me a break! What good does it do to ruin the mood? Granted, they’re here for*

*work, so they should be able to bear with it a little, but still…*

Level-wise, all the Worker teams here were on par with mythril-ranked

adventurers, which meant that they were better than these adventurers.

However, some things ought not to be said out loud.

*Someone, anyone, punch him to shut him up.*

Several of the Workers had evil glints in their eyes, and they were exchanging

glances. Hekkeran hurriedly ran over to Imina. No matter what happened, he

could not let her draw her blade.

However, the person who came to stop this was not a Worker.

“You must be Uzruth-sama, hm? I assure you that there will be no problems.”

“…Are you saying that on the assumption that we’re helping too? I could

understand it, in that case.”

“No. That is because there will be a stronger individual traveling with you —

Momon-san.”

A warrior in full plate armor poked his helmeted head out from one of the

carriages, as though in response to the butler’s icy tones. He had probably been

in the middle of moving luggage onto the carriage.

“Allow me to introduce you to the adamantite-ranked adventurer team of two,

Momon-san of Darkness and his teammate Nabe. The two of them will travel

with you and defend your campsite. I trust you will be able to accept that?”

The air changed again. The pinnacle of adventurers and Workers — those who

handled this sort of work — now stood before them. None of the Workers could

speak in the face of this proof of absolute strength.

The adventurers regained their good spirits as they saw the Workers’ naked

reaction to the most highly placed of all adventurers, and they went back to their

work. A man who looked like the gold-ranked adventurer team’s leader smiled,

and then spoke to the dark warrior:

“We’ll handle the rest; Momon-san, would you mind interacting with the

Workers? Being that you’re our leader, I hope that you will discuss our security

posture with the workers.”

“Alright. As long as your team agrees, I’ll take on this task, despite my lack of

ability. However, I believe you should be the ones to take charge of security.

After all, you’re more numerous, so it would be more convenient to follow your

lead instead.”

“Ah, no! What do you mean by a lack of ability? You’re being too humble!

Besides, how could we disregard the great Momon-san…”

“—No, I insist that you be in charge of security. Then, I’ll be counting on you

to skillfully command us. Nabe.”

Momon chuckled softly, and then lightly descended from the cabin. An

astoundingly beautiful woman followed behind him.

When a beautiful woman showed herself, people would sometimes make a

commotion out of shock. However, once her looks exceeded a certain threshold,

said people would not even be able to do that much. In the face of true beauty,

all people could do was allow their gazes to be stolen away.

“Hekkeran, he’s…”

“Mm, Rober, I’m thinking the same thing too. We saw him before, at the

North Market. That man is… Momon of Darkness, and his sole companion.

When you look at his mighty form, perhaps the rumors of him beating the Gigant

Basilisk were not so exaggerated after all.”

“Giga…! Is what you say really true?”

“So I heard. In addition, I heard Gringam say that he took out a difficulty 200

demon in one blow.”

“—That can’t possibly be real, a difficulty of 200 isn’t in the realm of

possibility for a human being… could it be that you misheard 100 as 200?”

“Even 100 would be quite amazing. But how shall I put this… after seeing his

words and actions, I feel like it’s the truth.”

He had grasped Momon’s character from his brief interaction with the leader

of the gold-ranked adventurers. He felt that the man exuded the dignity and

charisma befitting an adamantite-ranked adventurer, which naturally endeared

others to him.

“Before we mingle… I have a question to ask you.”

His voice was soft, yet its rich tones allowed everyone to feel his heroic spirit

through his armor.

“Why are you going to the ruins? I know you’ve been hired. But you’re not like

adventurers, who find it difficult to refuse a strongly worded request. Why

would you, whose actions are not bound, choose to accept this assignment?

What drives you to do such a thing?”

The Workers looked at each other. They hesitated over who should answer,

and in the end, it was someone from Palpatra’s team who spoke up.

“For money, of course.”

It was a perfect answer; there was no better reason than that. The Workers

had not hesitated over what answer they should have given, and Momon should

have expected such a matter-of-fact reply from them. The fact that he had still

asked the question anyway left them at a loss as to his true intentions.

After seeing the Workers murmur their agreement, Momon continued asking:

“That is to say, if your client pays you a great deal of money, it’s worth paying

with your lives?”

“Indeed. Our client offered us recompense that satisfied us. In addition, there

might be a further prize depending on what we find within the ruins. It is my

contention that such largesse warrants the risk of our lives.”

That answer came from Gringam.

“I see… so this is what you have all decided, then? I understand. Please forgive

me for asking such a *worthless question.*”

“Such a trifling matter requires no apology… do not allow it to weigh upon thy

heart.”

“Hyahyahya, well, if you’ve finished asking, might I ask a question in turn?”

“Please do, old sir.”

“I wish to verify a rumor I’ve heard. They say your strength is extraordinary;

may I see if those rumors are factual?”

“I see, seeing is believing, after all. Of course you may. I shall show you my

might if it means you will accept my… no, our protection. Then, how shall I

demonstrate my power?”

“The best way is to spar with someone else, of course!”

All eyes gathered on—

“—And of course, I will be the one to do the sparring, that’s right, me.”

“What? You, old sir? …My apologies, but I am not accustomed to holding back.

I do not wish to harm you, yet I have no confidence in restraining myself… do

you mind?”

“Hyahyahyahya! That’s adamantite for you! Not a thought given to the fact

that I might hurt you instead!”

A quiet chuckle came from under the helmet.

“But of course, old sir. This is the difference in our respective strengths — I

am strong, stronger than any of you. That is why I can bear the name of

adamantite.”

Despite his extraordinary arrogance and sense of superiority, it did not

displease those who saw it. This must be the presence of the man called Momon.

His statement overflowed with persuasive power in addition to a frightening

puissance that could slay countless foes.

“…How incredible.”

“Yes, he’s just too amazing.”

The feverish murmurs rose and fell.

Many women adored strong men. In terms of respect, many men were

fascinated by strong men. They were like moths mesmerized by a flame, and for

those who lived in a world of blood and steel, great power was the flame in

question. They could not tear themselves away from the charm that bound them,

even though they knew that they would be immolated if they misjudged their

distance.

“Hyahyahya! I doubt anyone will doubt that you’re adamantite-ranked now.

Still, speaking of which, it’s rare that we get a chance like this, so I’d like to get

a few pointers from you. The carriages here will get in the way, so could I borrow

that patch of empty ground, butler-dono?”

After receiving permission, Palpatra led everyone to the courtyard. It was not

just the Workers who followed him, but even the adventurers and butler as well.

“Given the revered elder’s skills, there’s probably no way he can do it.”

“—That man seems very strong.”

“Mm~ rather than say he is strong, it would be better so say that the divide

between them is precipitous. Even the two adamantite-ranked adventurer teams

in the Empire would hardly qualify as superhuman.”

“You have a point there. Silver Canary’s members have very exotic

professions, so they each have strange skills, but their overall abilities fall below

people with basic jobs. And I hear that the members of Eight Ripples derive their

strength from their numbers and teamwork.”

Silver Canary was led by a heroic bard, and its members all had exotic

vocations. Eight Ripples was a nine-man team. Due to their numbers, some said

that their strength was not yet adamantite-level, but others also said that as long

as they worked together to focus on a problem, they could handle problems

which even other adamantite-ranked adventurers could not tackle.

However, whether or not those two teams qualified as the secret weapons of

the human race, those who could make the impossible possible, the strongest

entities (adamantite) remained in doubt.

Hekkeran said all that after hearing his teammates whisper from behind him.

The three of them were not the only ones doing so. If one listened carefully,

one could hear the rest of them discussing various topics. The most-repeated

question was how long Palpatra could hold out. Nobody here felt that he could

beat Momon, because even after their brief time together, everyone had

acknowledged that the aura around Momon was most fitting of an adamantite-

ranked adventurer.

Hekkeran thought as he walked, and just then, someone came to his side. After

hearing the noise of metal armor, there was no need to ask who it was.

“Gringam, how do you think their fight will turn out?”

“While saying so might upset the revered elder, there is no doubt that Momon

will win. Beyond that is the question of how long the revered elder will endure.

Wilt thou not queue behind the revered elder?”

“As if, give me a break. How about you?”

“Permit me to humbly refuse. Witnessing a superhuman warrior in action is

more than enough for myself. Although, I would not object to a few lessons on

swordsmanship from him during the course of our journey.”

“Same here… ah!”

Momon and Palpatra stood before the two of them in the courtyard,

maintaining a distance between and looking at each other.

Palpatra’s eyes were not those of an ordinary old man. They were those of a

veteran campaigner.

The aura around him had hardened into needle-like killing intent, and the air

held no trace of this being just a regular old spar.

Everyone present broke out in a cold sweat, their hearts filled with

uneasiness.

“…Hey, this is pretty bad, right? The old man’s serious!”

Beside him, Gringam had reverted to his original way of speaking.

“Well, his opponent’s an adamantite-ranked adventurer, so he’s got no choice

but to be serious. Still…”

Hekkeran shifted his eyes towards the dark warrior standing off against the

old man. Having just spoken those words, he immediately drew a breath.

He could not sense anything from Momon.

His arms drooped down, he looked completely unguarded, and he did not look

like he was about to fight a duel of blades. He was as composed as an adult

looking at a child holding a sword.

“Amazing, he’s not reacting even in the face of such powerful bloodlust.

There’s no way he couldn’t have sensed his opponent’s killing intent. So this is

what the supreme perfection of warriorhood looks like. In other words, the

supreme perfection of emptiness!”

“Is this what they call no-heart?[2] Or the realm of clouds and water?[3] He’s

so calm despite the difference in their weapons. He must be extremely confident

in his skills… Ah, I want to throw myself down before him in awe.”

Palpatra was holding a magic item whose point was made from a whittled-

down Dragon’s fang. In contrast, Momon held a staff he had borrowed from one

of the adventurers. It did not look magical in any way. Magic weapons had all

sorts of special effects, from improved sharpness, improving their wielders’

abilities to doing additional damage and so on. Right now, Palpatra had an

overwhelming advantage in terms of armament.

“No, that’s probably not it. It’s true when it comes to weapons, but the

enchantments on Momon-san’s armor ought to be stronger than the old man’s.

His other magic items ought to be of a higher standard too. Overall, I’d say

they’re either pretty close or Momon-san has the advantage.”

“Art thou not too hasty in thine judgment? Hast thou not heard that the magic

items the revered elder carries are worth more than an adamantite-ranked

adventurer’s panoply? The revered elder has completed countless jobs over the

years. One could say he was the best paid man in the Empire!”

“Nonono, wait, wait…”

“Thou should’st calm thyself…”

As the two of them argued, the ever-rising urge battle-lust led to the beginning

of the duel.

“Then, shall I go first?”

“There’s more pressing work to be done after this. Don’t push yourself too

hard, come at me in a more relaxed way, old sir…”

Without letting Momon finish, Palpatra instantly stepped in with a

1. 2. A term in Buddhist philosophy referring to the total absence of obstructive thoughts.
2. 3. Another Buddhist term, this phrase refers to the ability to move and flow effortlessly.

smoothness, speed and power that an 80-year-old man should not have

possessed. In contrast, Momon had not even raised the staff in his hand.

“—[Dragon Fang Thrust]!”

Hekkeran’ eyes went wide as he saw Palpatra open with a martial art without

the slightest bit of hesitation.

The technique made his spear’s shaft curve, allowing him to stab twice, like a

Dragon’s fang. In addition, it could deal elemental damage on top of that. This

was a development of the martial art [Thrust], being a technique which Palpatra

had apparently developed over 40 years ago, and it had become widely known

due to its excellent balance. Many other warriors had learned that move up till

this date.

And among the Dragon Fang Thrusts, Palpatra had chosen the [Blue Dragon

Fang Thrust], with the additional effect of dealing electrical damage.

*What’s that old coot thinking?! We might have healing magic on hand, but nobody*

*would use a move like that under normal circumstances!*

A move like that, which could inflict electrical damage on the merest graze,

was ideal for use against an armored opponent. Palpatra’s use of that technique

was a sign of how deadly serious he was.

However, Momon easily avoided that strike, which would have otherwise been

the bane of someone in armor. Even in his jet-black full plate armor, his

movements were as graceful as a feather. More astounding was the fact that he

had not leapt away, but remained in place and dodged it while hardly moving at

all.

*That’s impossible! What kind of dexterity and motion-tracking vision is that?!*

“—[Gale Acceleration].”

Palpatra continued using his martial arts.

*You’ve gone too far, old man! Has your brain gone senile too?!*

“[Dragon Fang Thrust]!”

He used the same move from before upon Momon again. Snow-white freezing

vapors shrouded the spear’s tip; it was the [White Dragon Fang Thrust].

That lightning-fast series of four attacks—

A great commotion rose from the onlookers.

That was only to be expected. After all, not a single one of those four attacks

had managed to so much as touch Momon’s armor.

Palpatra leapt back. His forehead was beaded with sweat; he was not

exhausted from attacking, but the mental strain of wielding his spear on deadly

ground had been too much for him.

“He’s incredible!”

“—He’s stronger than Hekkeran.”

“But of course, Arche. Don’t compare me to him. He’s what they call the

highest-level adventurer, the peak of everything. That’s the power of an

adamantite-ranked adventurer.”

“Now then, I believe it is my turn next.”

Momon slowly raised his staff into a middle stance. In contrast, Palpatra took

the spear he had been clutching and rested it on his shoulders. That was not a

fighting stance; it was the posture of a man who had lost the will to fight — who

had given up the battle.

“That was incredible. I give up. My skills can’t even land a scratch on you,

much less beat you.”

“…Is that so.”

“Oh…”

Gasps of awe rose from the people watching by the side as Palpatra announced

his surrender. It was a truly overwhelming display; they had all seen with their

own eyes a difference like the one between children and adults.

The crowd debated excitedly, discussing what school his dodging footwork

hailed from and so on, sharing the emotions within their hearts. Hekkeran paid

them no heed and took Gringam with him as they went over to Palpatra, who

was wiping his sweat off as he spoke with Momon.

“Is it over, old sir?”

Momon’s tone and the air around him had turned gentle.

“…Don’t tell me you’re about to show your true power now?”

“…Hyahyahya, my, you speak quite harshly to an old man. That was my true

power just now. What you saw was the full extent of my abilities, Momon-dono.”

“—Ah, forgive me. I was being rude.”

“Please don’t apologize. That would fill me with shame. Also, you don’t have

to be so stiff when talking to me, because our worth isn’t measured in our years,

but in how skilled we are. Having a matchless man of power like yourself defer

to me makes me feel a little itchy.”

“…I see, then I shall dispense with the formalities, however reluctantly. That

said, I’m not quite satisfied with ending things here. If we do get another chance,

I’d like to make the first move instead. Now then, I still have to help move the

luggage into the carriage. I’ll see you later.”

“Moving luggage is a trivial task; you could hand it to someone else, right?

Surely this can’t be your job.”

“I don’t think so. No matter what position I may hold, I must still do the job

assigned to me.”

With those words, Momon returned to the carriage, trailed by that beautiful

girl. The two people who met them in passing watched them leave.

They looked at his mighty back.

“Hyahya, judging by your expressions, you seem to have something you want

to ask.”

“—Revered elder, what did thou think of that exchange?”

His wrinkled face twisted. It looked like a bitter smile, and at the same time

like something else.

“That man is very strong. No, as an adamantite-ranked adventurer, strength

comes with the territory, but I honestly had not expected him to be that

powerful. From the instant I faced him, I had the feeling that every blow I struck

would be blocked.”

Hekkeran felt the same way. He had also felt that any attack he launched

would have been easily blocked and promptly countered by the man called

Momon. And even if everything had gone according to plan, he could imagine

how his strikes would have been deflected by that armor. Palpatra had faced him

head on, so surely he must have felt that even more intensely.

“So that… is an adamantite-ranked adventurer.”

“Indeed. That is an adamantite-ranked adventurer, one who belongs to a

realm which only those favored by the heavens may dare to tread. Ahhh, what a

matchless beauty, a pinnacle to which we cannot hope to aspire… …say, you must

have been happy just to glimpse that peak, no?”

“Indeed! Watching from the sidelines, I could see thy movements clearly. If I

was facing him in person, surely I would not have been able to observe his skills

so calmly. Personally — while this may offend thee, revered elder — I would

have very much liked to see Momon-dono’s strength as he went from the defense

to the offense.”

“That’s impossible. Momon-dono had no intention of attacking me at all, I

couldn’t sense any fighting spirit from him. It was probably like he said, he sucks

at holding back. He must have felt that if he had actually struck at me, he could

have easily taken my life.”

If that were the case, then one could say Momon’s thinking was very arrogant.

That was because the old man — Palpatra — was a skilled warrior, yet Momon

had scorned him without so much as looking at his moves.

However, it was because he could do such a thing that he could be called an

adamantite-ranked adventurer.

“It can’t be helped, the difference between his strength and mine is far too

great. At first, I was unhappy too, but then he ended up taking the defense, and

evading all my strikes. What could I say after that?”

That was what it meant to be strong.

He had used a weapon which he was not familiar with — whose balance and

weight were completely different from what he normally used — to show how

confident he was. That was the difference between the two of them.

Palpatra whined, “Ahhh, so tired, so tired,” then turned his back on them and

left. Naturally, he was headed for the carriage.

As he watched Palpatra leave, Hekkeran heard a quiet grumble.

“Even when I was young, I could not step into that domain. So that’s

adamantite… what an unattainable peak…”

Palpatra’s back shrunk in his eyes. In contrast, Momon’s back seemed

massive, and oppressive.

“…That is the highest rank, that of adamantite.”

“Yes. It’s truly amazing.”

Nobody around them could dispute their awed words.

# *2*

# 

# 

# 

A carriage ran like the wind, over the paved roads of the Imperial Capital

Arwintar.

The magical beast that pulled the luxurious carriage had eight legs — it was a

Sleipnir. A pair of skilled-looking warriors occupied the driver’s seat, while

above the carriage’s cabin — in a place modified from a cargo rack — were four

magic casters and bow-wielding warriors, vigilantly watching their

surroundings.

The reason why such an excessive detachment of security personnel — like a

mobile defensive formation — was traveling so boldly over the roads was

immediately obvious once one saw who rode in the carriage.

Anyone with the slightest bit of academic knowledge would immediately

recognize the emblem of three crossed staves on the side of the carriage, and

from there they would know who it belonged to and who rode within it. That

was why the knights on guard duty by the roadside did not stop the carriage and

its passengers for questioning.

There were three men in the carriage. All of them were dressed in long robes,

and they looked like magic casters.

All three of them were renowned individuals within the Empire’s magical

society, but their attitudes showed the distinct differences in their status. The

most highly placed of them was a white-haired old man.

Just as Gazef Stronoff was a famed warrior, when one spoke of magic casters,

nobody’s name echoed across the surrounding nations like this man did. This

old man was the Empire’s most powerful grand magic caster, “Tri-Arts” Fluder

Paradyne.

Seated opposite Fluder were his adept disciples, who could use the fourth tier

of magic.

After leaving the Imperial Capital, an air of silence had filled the interior of

the carriage. As though unable to bear the crushing pressure, one of his disciples

nervously asked:

“Master, what about his Majesty’s orders?”

Silence filled the carriage once again, but only for a moment. Fluder replied

in a calm, inscrutable voice:

“This is his Majesty’s will, and as his vassal I must investigate. However, doing

so through magic is far too dangerous. We ought to start with researching the

archives, then summon demons to gather information.”

“So that means you don’t know either, Master?”

Fluder closed his eyes, then opened them a few seconds later.

“Unfortunately I have been too long isolated, and I have never heard of a

mighty fiend named Jaldabaoth.”

A month ago, an army of demons had assaulted the Kingdom’s capital.

According to the information obtained, their commander Jaldabaoth and the

maid demons attending him were incomprehensibly fearsome beings.

This demonic disturbance had caused the Empire’s knight corps — which

invaded the Kingdom every year — to stay put. Normally, it was perfectly

sensible in warfare to attack a beleaguered foe.

However, the fact was that there were two main reasons for the Empire to

make war upon the Kingdom.

One of them was to indirectly exhaust the strength of the Kingdom. In

contrast to the Empire’s professional armed forces, the Kingdom employed

conscription. Therefore, every time the Empire mobilized its troops, the

Kingdom would have no choice but to rally the masses in order to make up for

the shortfall of individual quality in their troops. For that reason, the Empire

had embarked on a long-term plan: they declared war during the harvest season,

forcing the Kingdom to gather its peasants and have them take the field. As a

result, the peasants lacked the manpower needed for a proper harvest, which in

turn damaged the Kingdom’s agricultural output.

Another reason for doing so was to weaken the strength of the nobles within

the Empire. The nation would levy a special war tax on nobles who opposed the

Emperor, making them cough up funds. If they refused to pay, they would be

charged as traitors and stripped of their holdings. In the end, whether they were

strangled to death or swiftly decapitated, the end came for them all the same.

For these reasons, the Emperor — Jircniv — believed that once the Kingdom

exhausted itself, the Empire would not need to force itself to go to war. After all,

the nobles within the Empire were almost all toothless.

However, one problem remained.

Where had the wicked Jaldabaoth gone? What sort of being was he? It was all

very disturbing.

That was why he had ordered Fluder, the Empire’s top magic caster to

investigate Jaldabaoth. One could say it was only to be expected.

“Also, there’s Darkness’ Momon — who defeated Jaldabaoth — and his

companion, ‘Beautiful Princess’ Nabe. Both of them are quite interesting. Then,

there’s the mysterious magic caster Ainz Ooal Gown. Have these hidden heroes

finally decided to make their move? Perhaps there might be an intense battle

like the one against the Demon Gods 200 years ago.”

“…Will there be one?”

“We don’t know yet. However, only a fool would start preparing for it after it

happened. The wise are always on watch against the future.”

Eventually, the carriage reached its destination.

The sprawling grounds were encircled with thick, imposing walls, with

watchtowers to keep an eye on both the inside and outside. Hand-picked knights

from the First Legion — the most elite of the eight Imperial Knight Legions —

were mixed with a number of magic casters into several security teams, which

were in charge of surveillance.

When one looked to the sky, one could even see members of the Emperor’s

own bodyguard, the Royal Air Guard, mounted on flying beasts, as well as high-

tier magic casters using flight magic as they stood on watch.

This place was the symbol of the Empire’s power, into which the previous

Emperor had channeled the greater part of his efforts and energies — the

Imperial Ministry of Magic.

The production of magical equipment for the knights, the development of

new spells, research into raising the standard of living through magical

experiments and so on; all of these could be said to be the essence of the

Empire’s magic, and they took place here. And the overall person in charge of

this place — although the Ministry of Magic had no commanding officer — was

Fluder.

The carriage passed through the grounds, and finally stopped at a tower in the

heart of the grounds.

They had passed many strangely shaped buildings on the way here, and many

people had come and gone from each building, but there was hardly any

movement of people in and out of this tower. However, in contrast, the security

around this tower was much stiffer than that around the other buildings.

For starters, the knights here were dressed differently. They were not the

same as the First Legion knights in other places.

They were sheathed in suits of enchanted full plate armor, carrying magic

shields, and with magic weapons at their waists. Their crimson capes — which

were embroidered with the emblem of the Empire — were also magic items, of

course.

While the enchantments on their gear were somewhat weak, ordinary knights

could not wear such equipment, not even in the Empire. The most important

thing was that ordinary knights would never be assigned to such a vital state

institution.

These ultra-elite knights were part of the Emperor’s bodyguard, the Royal

Earth Guard.

The magic casters lined up here were no less impressive than the knights

themselves. These experienced, valorous magic casters had the air of grizzled

veterans around them.

In addition, there were four Stone Golems, each over two and a half meters

tall, guarding the entrance. They did not sleep and they did not rest and they did

not eat, eternally focused on their duty as guardians.

The security around this facility was as heavy as that defending the Emperor’s

own body, and only elite magic casters whose levels were in the upper reaches

of the third tier or a very few research-oriented magic casters were permitted

entry. Naturally, Fluder and his two disciples were permitted entry into this

tower.

The three of them raised their hands to acknowledge the knights and magic

casters presenting arms to them, and then they entered the building. After

walking through a straight passage, the three of them came to the upper level of

a room shaped like a crucible. Many magic casters worked here. The highest-

ranked of them hurriedly ran up to Fluder.

“Has there been any progress?”

“Not at all, Master.”

The disciples gulped, and his Adam’s apple shifted. The usual answer had two

meanings, good and bad.

Fluder simply nodded, with a complex expression on his face, and then turned

to the 30 disciples he had personally tutored — they were particularly famous

disciples, known as the Chosen Thirty — and faced one of them, who was the

assistant supervisor of this building.

“Is that so. You still haven’t been able to induce a natural genesis, then?”

“Indeed. Not even a Skeleton, the least of all undead, has appeared so far.

Currently, we are placing corpses beside it in the hope of inducing the creation

of Zombies.”

“Mhm.”

Fluder stroked his long beard, and then looked down at the sight beneath him.

There were ten-odd Skeletons there, and they were tilling a field.

Each Skeleton raised their hoe, then swung them down, in an identical

manner to the one on either side of it. If one were to look at them from the side,

their overlapping forms would seem like just a single Skeleton.

This highly coordinated spectacle, which vaguely resembled a form of group

exercise, was the true identity of the large-scale project which the Empire had

been conducting. In other words, it was “undead labor.”

The undead did not need to eat, drink or sleep, and they did not tire. In other

words, they were the perfect workers. Granted, low-tier undead were

unintelligent; they could only listen to orders, and they could not perform

complex tasks. However, that problem could be solved by having someone stand

by to supervise them every step of the way.

The merits of ordering the undead to carry out tasks in a crop field had

exceeded their expectations. The reduction of manpower costs had reduced the

prices of crops, expanded the farms and fields, eliminated the risk of human-

related damage and so on. It was truly a dream plan.

There were other, similar plans, using summoned monsters and Golems

instead, but after taking all factors into consideration, the undead were still the

most cost-effective choice.

However, there was still a reason why such a seemingly perfect plan could not

be put into practice on a large scale.

That was because people opposed it — in particular, the factions led by the

priests. They believed that creating undead, creatures of death which hated life,

was an act which stained the soul.

There were also problems from a religious perspective.

They used the corpses of criminals to make undead, but the religious point of

view was that a criminal’s sin was paid off with the execution of their sentence.

Going any further would be a form of blasphemy, and convincing them

otherwise was a very difficult task.

Perhaps they might be able to talk them round if the nation was facing a

desperate food shortage and many people were starving to death. However, the

Empire’s food stocks were ample, and they had no problems with manpower.

For these reasons, the clergy opposed this plan.

Ultimately, the true reason for this plan was to increase their military power.

With the undead to handle production, they could divert their human resources

elsewhere, potentially increasing the amount of talent for the knight corps and

other fields.

In addition, once undead labor became widespread, there were people who

were worried that human laborers would be made redundant. In addition, the

undead would not listen to humanity forever, and large amounts of undead

might upset the balance of life and death and lead to the spontaneous genesis of

more powerful undead. It was not just the priests, but anyone who heard of the

plan that was unsettled by it.

The reason for this facility’s existence was to address each of these concerns

and find a solution to them.

“You haven’t found the underlying reason yet?”

“No, Master. My deepest apologies, Master.”

Why did the undead arise by themselves? Exploring this fundamental reason

would have a decisive influence on the future.

There was a place which was perpetually shrouded in a light mist that only

lifted when the Kingdom and the Empire did battle. That place was a cursed land,

known as the Katze Plains. Undead appeared here at an alarmingly high rate,

even Skeletal Dragons — some of the most powerful undead beings — who were

immune to magic.

Even if the Empire wanted to conquer the region around E-Rantel in the

future, they did not want to have undead-spawning land in their domain. Thus,

discovering the process by which the undead arose would definitely be an aid to

rulership. Perhaps they might even find a way to keep the undead from spawning

ever again.

“Is that so, I understand.”

The assistant supervisor bowed, grateful to have been spared a rebuke. Fluder

walked past him, going in one big circle around the crucible-shaped room.

By the time Fluder reached the door on the other side, there were more

disciples behind him.

The knights guarding the door pushed it open, and the group passed through

it. Behind the door was a passage like the one just now, but it was much colder

than the outside, and there was nobody around. The scent of dust hung in the

air, and the light was losing its battle with the darkness that pressed in on it.

They walked along the corridor and its dread-filled atmosphere, and soon they

came to a spiral staircase that extended downwards.

They passed through many doors in the process, and they did not spend much

time going *clack clack clack* down the spiral staircase; they were probably only

five floors underground. Even so, the air was heavy, as though they were in a

deeper place.

This was not because they were underground. The best proof of that was that

everyone — Fluder included — had a stiff expression on their faces.

When they reached the bottom — an empty room — everyone had a grim set

to their faces. They were visibly tense, perhaps even ready for battle.

Everyone’s eyes were fixed on the single, heavy door in the room. That door

was filled with a sense of foreboding oppression, and it seemed to set this world

apart from what lay beyond. In order to prevent its destruction or easy opening,

the door was reinforced with several layers of physical and magical protection.

This was a door which would not permit escape.

In addition, the many sturdy doors they had passed through on the way here

spoke of the danger behind this final door. If the threat behind this door stirred,

those door-shaped walls could buy some time; in other words, they were

effectively a seal.

Fluder issued a warning to his disciple in a tense voice.

“You must not be careless.”

It was a simple, terse statement, but that just made it all the more frightening.

The magic casters accompanying him nodded deeply, as one. Fluder gave

them the same warning every time they came here, but since they knew what

lurked behind that door, their expressions had never once slacked off.

That was because the ultimate undead was behind that door. If it was

permitted to escape this place, it would spark a tragedy of unprecedented

proportions in the Imperial Capital.

Several people began casting protective spells. These spells did not just

defend against physical threats, but also included spells which protected the

mind. After giving them ample time to prepare, Fluder looked around at his

disciples’ faces, and saw that they were filled with determination.

He nodded, and then uttered the keyword which would undo the seal.

The heavy doors went *thoom,* and by the power of magic, they slowly opened.

Chilly air spilled out of the darkened room, and several of his disciples

shivered, as though they were very cold. Even with magic items that allowed

them to adapt to the environment, the hatred for the living which emanated

from the depths of the room was enough to chill their soul.

The sound of someone swallowing seemed particularly resonant here.

“Let’s go.”

After hearing Fluder’s words, his disciples created several magical lights to

disperse the darkness of the room. Yet, for some reason, it felt like the darkness

was thicker and heavier beyond the light it had fled.

Led by Fluder, the group entered the room which was filled with the odor of

death.

It was a small room, so the magical lanterns soon illuminated the room’s

innermost reaches.

There stood a gigantic pillar which reached the ceiling. This tombstone-like

pillar certainly attracted attention. But what truly held the eye was the entity

that was crucified to it with thick and heavy chains.

Each link of the chains which bound it was much thicker than a grown man’s

thumb, rendering it completely immobile. The chains were secured to the stony

floor of the room. In addition, its arms and legs were hobbled with gigantic iron

balls.

No entity could so much as move a finger under these conditions. This

excessively harsh method of binding instead showed how wary they were of this

entity. Therefore, whenever someone in the group looked on the thick chains,

they still felt uneasy. They feared that this creature would easily snap the chains

and regain its freedom.

From the outside, it looked like a knight in black full plate armor. However,

there was a huge difference between it and a fully armored man.

The first thing that caught the eye was its massive frame. Even a casual

estimate of its height would put it above two meters in height.

After that, there was its black full plate armor. The armor was covered in

tracery that looked like blood vessels, and studded with brutal-looking spikes. A

pair of demonic-looking horns sprouted from its helmet, and it exposed the face,

which was a rotten human visage. Two crimson points of light shone from within

the empty orbits of its eye sockets, formed of hatred for the living and a longing

for massacre.

It was not a living being, but one of the dead. Otherwise, it could not radiate

such an intense hatred for the living.

“Death… Knight.”

One of the disciples, who had come here for the first time, spoke the name of

the legendary undead creature. Since it was a being of legends, it was not

particularly well known.

The red points of light within the Death Knight’s eyes moved, sizing up all the

magic casters like it was licking them with its gaze. No; they could not possibly

see any movement from within those dancing masses of light. However, the

spine-chilling terror made them feel that the death knight was looking right at

them.

The people who came here were all mighty individuals in their own right, each

capable of casting third-tier spells at a minimum. Yet, even they could not stop

the chattering of their teeth.

Despite their spells to protect their minds, they could not stop the fear welling

up from within them. Yet, the reason why they had pulled themselves together

and not fled was probably because of their magical protections.

“—Be strong. The weak-willed will perish.”

After issuing his warning, Fluder approached the Death Knight. The Death

Knight reacted to him; it radiated killing intent and began flexing its limbs.

The chains groaned as the Death Knight struggled and pulled its bonds taut,

and its body quivered.

Fluder extended his hand straight at the Death Knight.

His incantation reverberated through the darkened room, lit by magical light.

This was a modified version of [Summon Undead – 6th], an original spell penned

by Fluder.

“—[Obey].”

The spell took effect — Fluder’s quiet words flowed out and filled the room.

However, the Death Knight’s eyes were still filled with hatred for the living.

Everyone knew the spell had failed.

“…So I still can’t control it, even now?”

There was a hint of regret within Fluder’s voice. That was because he had tried

to control this undead creature for the past five years, without success.

# 

●

# 

They had discovered this monster in that place known for being haunted by

the undead, the Katze Plains.

The squad of Imperial knights who had first encountered this monster had

never seen it before, but they were under orders, so they attacked it as per

standard procedure. Several seconds later, they realized how rash and foolish

they had been. The faces of those Imperial knights, known by all for their skill

and bravery, were filled with fear and despair.

They had been utterly and one-sidedly overwhelmed — their opposition was

far too strong.

After their foe mowed down countless knights like the passing of a violent

gale, they finally realized that there was nothing they could do against it, and

began to retreat.

Of course, they could not just leave such a monster be, especially after

personally witnessing the murdered knights become undead beings, serving the

monster as its minions. Clearly, the more time they gave their opponent, the

worse the situation would become.

After intensive debate among the Empire’s leadership, they decided to open

with their trump card; the most powerful fighting force in the Empire, which

was to say they would mobilize Fluder and his adept disciples.

And so, the Death Knight had been captured and imprisoned here, which was

to say that the battle had ended with Fluder and company victorious. However,

the reason why Fluder and the others had won was simply because the Death

Knight had no way to fly. They launched a sustained area attack on it that was

no different from carpet bombing — a repeated barrage of [Fireball]s from the

air, which slowed the Death Knight’s movements, and in the end Fluder, who

had been mesmerized by its overwhelming power, had captured it intact.

Currently, Fluder had imprisoned it here and gone through countless spells,

countless magic items and countless means — searching through all the means

which could control an undead being in order to control the Death Knight.

# 

●

# 

“What a shame… if only I could control this monster, I’d be able to surpass

that magic caster and become the greatest magic caster.”

If he succeeded, he would be far superior to the necromancer of the Thirteen

Heroes, Rigrit Bers Caurau.

In truth, Fluder was not particularly interested in strength. His true ambition

lay in peering into the abyss. This was just a step along that road.

His disciples did not understand that, and so they began spouting misplaced

consolation instead.

“Master, you’ve long since exceeded that hero.”

“Exactly. The Thirteen Heroes are beings from the past; there’s no way they

can beat our Master, who stands at the pinnacle of modern magic.”

“I also feel that Master has long since surpassed the Thirteen Heroes.

However, if Master could take control of the Death Knight, the Empire would

possess a source of incredible power.”

“It’s often said that an individual can’t defeat a group, but that’s just because

the individual’s too weak. That Death Knight is the most powerful individual

around.”

Fluder was standing at the head of the group, so none of them saw him smile

bitterly to himself. Only the hate-filled eyes of the Death Knight saw it.

“Still, if even Master cannot take control of it… then how powerful *is* that

Death Knight, anyway?”

“That… who knows? Theoretically speaking, it should be controllable. What

are we missing? Does anyone have any ideas?”

The group’s answer to that was silence.

The undead could be controlled through magic, and one of the Thirteen

Heroes had done just that. Fluder’s power was such that he could control undead

beings of quite a high level. Perhaps he could even take control of the Death

Knight before his eyes.

However, that was simply theoretical. Actually controlling an undead being

with magic involved more complex mechanisms. Fundamentally speaking,

controlling or destroying the undead was the domain of the priests, who

borrowed the power of the gods. Magic casters used arcane power to emulate

divine might, so various discrepancies were only to be expected.

“…It’s not my intention to insult you, Master, but…”

One of his disciples began cautiously with that, and Fluder bade him continue

speaking.

“Could it be you’re simply not strong enough, Master? If magic of the seventh

tier exists, then perhaps the Death Knight might require undead-summoning

magic of that level in order to command it…”

“That is a good observation.”

“I’ve heard that the Adventurer’s Guild often summarizes the data of various

monsters and converts them into a difficulty rating. Perhaps that line of thought

is worth pursuing?”

“I’ve heard those values are very crude and are essentially meaningless due to

changes in body and age,” another disciple said.

“Still, other than unknown monsters, there’s no metric which is easier to

understand. After all, those values are based on combat feedback from

adventurers and other forms of data; it can’t be completely inaccurate.”

“Going by what you said, you still can’t use it on a legendary-class monster

like the Death Knight.”

“Ah yes, Master. Does that secret tome which records all manner of monsters

mention that particular monster?”

“No,” Fluder said while stroking his beard. “Perhaps the complete version of

the Eryuentiu might, but the only copies circulating in the outside world are not

complete.”

One of his disciples seemed to have a question, which he addressed to a

disciple next to him. While his voice was very soft, the room was the very

embodiment of silence, and so his words seemed surprisingly loud.

“What’s the Eryuentiu?”

“Isn’t it the name of a city?”

“I know that, but it sounds really weird.”

“Hm… I looked it up once. I think it’s a word from an ancient language which

means, ‘The great tree at the heart of the world.’”

Fluder rapped the floor with his staff, as a warning to his chatting disciples.

This was a dangerous place which incarcerated a legendary-class monster.

Carelessness was strictly forbidden.

His disciples heeded the warning, and the master of the chamber (silence)

ruled it once more, aside from the sounds of the Death Knight struggling against

its chains in an attempt to break them.

“What a shame. There’s no need for us to stay here any longer. Let’s go.”

“Yes.”

After hearing the chorus of relieved replies, Fluder strode away from the

Death Knight with big steps.

# 

●

# 

Even someone like Fluder could not maintain the same pace leaving the room

as he had when entering it. His steps quickened as he felt the Death Knight’s

vicious glare burning into his back. In that respect, his disciples were the same

as him.

As Fluder walked through the darkness, he recalled the word his disciples had

mentioned just now.

Eryuentiu.

It was the capital of the kingdom founded by the Eight Greed Kings, and also

its sole surviving city. At the same time, it was also a city defended by 30 city

guardians equipped with magical arms and armor that surpassed conventional

reason.

It was said that there were magic items left behind by the Eight Greed Kings

there, and with them, he would surely be able to vastly improve his own magical

skills. Fluder thought. These incredible items had never fallen into anyone’s

hands, and only the Thirteen Heroes had been allowed to take several pieces

away.

A black flame flickered in Fluder’s heart.

The Thirteen Heroes; heroes of the past. Fluder’s might ought to have been

the equivalent of theirs, but only they had been granted that permission, while

he had not. In what way did he not measure up to them?

Fluder tried to put out the wavering fire in his heart, thinking of other things

to reassure himself. His present position and all the things he had built were no

less than what the Thirteen Heroes had done. No, among the Empire’s magic

casters, Fluder’s status was greater even than the Thirteen Heroes.

However, once that the black fire — the flame of jealousy — blazed up, it

could not be easily extinguished, because what he envied was not their power,

their knowledge, or their abilities, but rather, the fact that they had obtained a

chance to peer into the abyss of magic.

Fluder was a magic caster of the highest order; nobody would dispute that.

The only people who could compare to him were the Thirteen Heroes of the

past. However, he could not control the Death Knight, and of the ten tiers of

magic that were said to exist — although the reliability of that information was

a little low — he could only cast spells of up to the sixth tier.

This situation was a stark reminder that he was far from the abyss of magic.

Fluder was old.

Among the sage arts he had learned as a spiritual magic caster was a certain

branch known as the forbidden arts. He had used this forbidden magic to stop

his aging. Of course, given the level of magic Fluder had mastered, using that

spell was very difficult. In the end, he had barely managed to cast it with a ritual

spell.

However, since this was a twisting of the impossible into the possible, it had

been distorted. The spell which should have granted immortality if perfectly cast

instead allowed Fluder to experience, ever so slightly, the passage of time.

He could still handle it now. However, the distortion would grow larger, and

eventually there would be a weakness in it.

Indeed. Fluder would die before he could gaze into the abyss of magic.

Perhaps if a skilled predecessor had guided him, he might have been able to

reach his current position sooner. However, there had been nobody ahead of

him, so all he could do was blaze his own trail.

Fluder nonchalantly looked at the disciples around him.

He looked around at the people who walked along the trail Fluder had blazed.

It was fuel to the fire of his jealousy, which blazed even more fiercely.

He… as the most knowledgeable person present, how old had he been when

he had been at his disciples’ level? No, there was no need to think about it; he

would surely have been older than his disciples were. That was how great the

difference was without anybody to guide him, without anybody to show him the

way.

Why did he not have a Master of his own?

Fluder tried to think in a different direction to mask the complaints he often

had.

# 

●

# 

—It was fine, right? He would go down in history as a forerunner. Every single

magic caster would give thanks to Fluder for the results he had left behind,

which were derived from the trail he had blazed. *These pupils are my treasure; so*

*long as any of them reaches a greater height than myself, it will be a part of my*

*accomplishments too—*

# 

●

# 

Fluder thought of one of his disciples while consoling himself. That disciple

had long since departed his side.

What tier could that girl have reached?

“—Arche Eeb Ryle Furt.”

She was an excellent girl. She had mastered the second tier of magic at a young

age, and even begun her first steps upon the third. So long as she continued

training, she might well have been able to reach Fluder’s domain. But regretfully,

at the end, she had abandoned her studies for some reason…

Fluder had been utterly disappointed back then. All he could think of was that

she had been terribly foolish.

“What a shame.”

Perhaps she had been the one that got away.

Where was that girl now? Fluder thought, *perhaps I could try and find her. If she*

*can use magic of the third tier, perhaps I could give her a good position.*

That said, there were still things which had to be done.

Fluder incanted the command word, and opened the heavy door.

After that, he exited the room, and took several deep breaths with his

disciples. That was because the air in the Death Knight’s room was heavy with

the stench of its presence, and it felt like the air would not enter their lungs.

“Master!”

A low, coarse voice called out to him. There stood one of his adept disciples,

who was also a famous male adventurer. Due to the breadth of his experience,

he was the second-in-command of the Ministry of Magic’s security forces.

“…What happened? Is there an emergency?”

“No, not an emergency. Two adamantite-ranked adventurers desire an

audience with you, Master.”

Fluder looked upon the man with suspicion.

He had not arranged for a meeting with anyone. Fluder was the highest-

ranked magic caster in the Empire. He had a lot of work to do, and then he

needed to conduct his own magical research on top of that; he simply did not

have any free time. He could not simply nod when someone said they wanted to

meet him. In the Empire, only the Emperor could see him without making an

appointment in advance.

That said, he could not summarily reject the request. Adamantite-ranked

adventurers were heroes. They were individuals, but they were not beings he

could simply overlook. The same applied even for a great magic caster like

Fluder. At times, he would request them to help him find exotic objects, so he

could not just ignore them.

“Are they from Silver Canary? Or Eight Ripples?”

He spoke the names of the Empire’s two adamantite-ranked adventurer

teams.

However, his disciple shook his head.

“No. They are a duo calling themselves Darkness. They even produced

adamantite plates to prove their identity.”

“What did you say?”

The adventurer team Darkness’ name was well known throughout the

Kingdom. Even with just two members, they had accomplished many heroic

deeds. Apparently, they had recently challenged Jaldabaoth, who had caused

havoc in the Royal Capital, and fought him off.

Why would people like that come to see him? Several questions appeared in

his heart, but more than that, he wanted to discuss magical knowledge with the

“Beautiful Princess” Nabe, said to be a very high-level magic caster. He

immediately cast his doubts to the back of his mind.

However, he was the Emperor’s servant, after all, and he remembered that his

lord Jircniv wanted to see them.

He would bring the matter up after their meeting. Fluder gave orders to his

disciples as he thought.

“Show them the way. I will tidy myself up and head over immediately.”

# *3*

# 

# 

# 

“Ah! I didn’t expect there to actually be ruins! What a shock. While I thought

that it probably wouldn’t be a lie, given the sizable payout, I can’t believe there

was actually an unexplored ruin smack in the middle of a grass plain like this.

Really surprising, right?”

As they heard Hekkeran ask that, his comrades responded with their

agreement.

Apparently, this was a tomb of some sort, but when they actually saw it, it

seemed to be sunk into the earth itself — as though something had pressed it

down, like a basin.

One possible reason why ruins like these had not been explored was because

the surrounding land was grass as far as the eye could see, with no remains of

ancient cities nearby to draw adventurers’ attention. In addition, small hillocks

of dirt were scattered around it like stars in the sky, so even if there were ruins

buried in one of them, they would have missed it. The central building protruded

a little, but one could only see it after climbing to a high vantage like this.

Part of the dirt wall surrounding the ruins had collapsed, exposing part of the

walls, which was how the ruins had been discovered. That was the shared

opinion of the various teams.

“No doubt about it. In truth, I’m quite excited about this. After all, unexplored

ruins might contain startling treasures.”

“That’s a bit hard to say, but given that there haven’t been any problems for

the area around the ruins, it’s pretty clear that there aren’t any dangerous

monsters within. More than that, I’m more uneasy that our client actually

specified a location for a base camp.”

The campsite was situated on the plains. One could say it was an ideal

location.

Since it was surrounded by scattered hillocks, which blocked line of sight, they

did not have to worry about being spotted from afar. All they had to do was be

mindful of the light from their fires and torches, and it would be very hard for

others to spot them.

And because of that — he was afraid.

“How did our client know about this place?”

The most likely answer was that the client had searched for an ideal location

for a campsite around here for some reason. That would explain a lot.

But if that were the case, it would raise more questions in turn. For instance,

why had the client thought of having them camp in such a secluded spot, and

why would an Imperial noble enter the Kingdom’s territory?

“—I once heard that there was a massive criminal organization in the

Kingdom, called Eight Fingers, if I’m not wrong. They say that organization did

a lot of evil things.”

“I heard they even did smuggling to the Empire. Some of my thief friends

complained that they were really influential in the Kingdom, so investigating

them would cause a lot of problems.”

Imina pressed down her wind-tossed hair and spoke after Arche finished.

Roberdyck spoke in quiet tones, like he was spitting on the ground:

“I’ve heard about their drugs. When used properly, medicines can be very

helpful. But these people turn medicine into narcotics, which they sell to and

use to harm the weak. I find that very displeasing.”

That he raised his voice slightly could not be helped. After all, Roberdyck had

become a Worker to help the weak.

“That’s enough talk of all this idle fantasy that has nothing to do with the job.

According to Arche’s research, our client isn’t doing anything dubious, but might

be the subject of a purge, is he not?”

“Perhaps I didn’t investigate thoroughly enough, or it was very well hidden,”

Arche said quietly. However, Hekkeran paid it no heed, and looked to the others

for confirmation.

“Well, I think everyone understands.”

“Of course. Don’t mention that in front of the other teams. After all, Workers

sometimes get requests from Eight Fingers for smuggling. We won’t shoot our

mouths off if there’s a chance any of the other teams might be involved with that

group. At least, until we’re done with this job.”

“Still, there’s no telling how many people’s tears went into our payment, and

how dirty it is.”

“—Even if the money’s dirty, a payout is still a payout, and you can survive on

it.”

Roberdyck glanced at Arche, then inhaled and exhaled deeply to cool himself

down.

“—My apologies, I was being rude.”

“It’s fine, I almost said something rude myself. Please forgive me.”

“—Please don’t worry about it, because you didn’t actually say anything. I just

wanted you to know that was how I thought about it. I’m not looking for spiritual

fullness, but material satisfaction. However…” Arche quickly raised her hand, to

indicate she was not done yet. “I’ve been doing my best to avoid doing things

that harm my companions, because I’ve seen many people who destroyed

themselves in pursuit of their desires.”

“I believe you, Arche.”

Arche nodded, and nobody said anything to her. The message had been passed

even without speaking. They had all argued with each other several times in the

past, and they had long since built up a relationship of mutual trust.

“So, what do you guys think? I feel that the tomb might be ruled by some kind

of entity.”

Hekkeran’s eyes carefully studied the cut grass. That aside, the angel and

goddess statues positioned all over the place were very intricately carved,

making onlookers gasp in awe. It was evident at a glance that they had been

regularly maintained.

In contrast, the trees standing everywhere around the graveyard were twisted

and drooping, creating a gloomy atmosphere. There was no order in the way the

tombstones were arranged, sticking up from the ground like the teeth of some

ugly witch. They felt very out of place in contrast to the cleaned portions.

*Someone was in charge of this place. However, that someone was not a normal*

*person,* went the frightening conjecture which rose from the pit of his stomach.

In order to banish the chill that ran through him, Hekkeran turned his

attention to the huge building. There was a mausoleum in the north, south, east,

and west of the graveyard interior, and in the center was a magnificent

mausoleum. Eight tall warrior statues were positioned around the great

mausoleum. They radiated an oppressive feeling, as though they were intent on

eliminating all threats and evildoers who came near the mausoleum.

“The vegetation in the graveyard’s been neatly trimmed. There isn’t even a

trace of algae here, so someone must be taking good care of it. But what kind of

person are they?”

Indeed, each team — Tenbu aside — had felt something was amiss when they

researched the records about the job.

Looking around at the place itself, what they saw was plains and more plains.

It was singularly unsuited to building a tomb.

For starters, one had to consider the convenience factor. Building such a

luxurious tomb in such a deserted place made no sense at all; it was far too

inconvenient.

It would be understandable if this was not to honor the dead, but to serve as

a memorial to future generations. After all, people sometimes built monuments

upon places where great deeds took place.

However, in that case, the fact that this great accomplishment had not been

passed down in history felt entirely unnatural. All the teams had shared the

information they had gathered, but there was no relevant data among it, which

indicated that this ruin might have been erased from history.

It all seemed highly irregular.

There was a bizarre sensation, like something stuck in his throat, and it made

him furrow his brows.

“Still, there might be a big incident depending on who’s staying in the ruins.

Have you checked up on that yet?”

“…I just hope they’re not innocent people.”

“—The brains of the various teams put their heads together just now, and they

said that the Guild doesn’t know anything about ruins in this area. It’s also far

from the nearby villages, so it’s not likely that there’ll be commoners around. If

there’s anyone here, then they’ll be illegal squatters — the kind who can’t show

their faces in public — or monsters. Since there’s no traces of footprints exiting

the ruins, what we came up with was that either the creatures inside don’t need

to eat or drink, or the interior of the ruins are self-sustaining. However, since

we know too little, we’re limited to stereotypes for further theory crafting,

which might lead to our thinking being constrained. That’s where we left our

consideration of the ruins.”

Once people discovered a set of ruins, news about it would be disseminated

to various government organizations through the Adventurer’s Guild, and the

first people to discover it would have investigation rights for a limited period.

Under that arrangement, those people who discovered ruins which had been

previously unknown to the nation or the Adventurer’s Guild had unspoken

permission to kill any illegal squatters occupying the ruins.

In that respect, they had adopted a policy of “kill them on suspicion.”

Perhaps this was a very brutal policy, but humans were weak creatures in this

world. Therefore, beings of unknown provenance occupying territory at the edge

of human lands would be very troublesome.

The fact was, roughly 20 years ago, there had been a group called Zuranon

which occupied a set of ruins, performed frightening experiments, and caused a

major disaster. An entire city had been destroyed while everyone had sat back

and watched due to a lack of information.

The Guild made that rule in order to prevent the same kind of mistakes from

happening again.

“Ah, under normal circumstances, it’d probably be the undead. If the undead

really have taken over these ruins, then we’ll need to clear them out and

consecrate the place to disperse the negative energy, else it’ll be bad, right?”

“Like you said, it would be very bad. Leaving the undead be will only lead to

the appearance of more powerful undead. That’s why powerful undead often

appear in places like ruins and so on.”

“It would save a lot of trouble if they were just Golems tidying up the ruins

on orders from their previous masters. Then, what do you plan to do after this?”

“—I think Hekkeran should attend the meeting in my place.”

“Don’t worry about it, the other team leaders didn’t take part either, right?

This is called making full use of one’s resources, mm.”

Hekkeran winked at Arche, and she sighed with deliberate loudness.

“—In any case, all the teams will move in after dark. We’ll enter from four

directions at once and meet up at the central mausoleum.

“I see, because we’ll be spotted more easily when entering in the day.”

“—Correct.”

The surrounding terrain was open, and there were no signs of observers or

travelers. Thus, entering directly was also a valid option, but they had to be on

watch against unexpected situations. It was somewhat safer to move around in

the dark.

Besides, they might still be able to learn something if they continued

observing the ruins, though they only had until nightfall. This job was under time

constraints, but it would not hurt to spend some time here. That was probably

what the smart people thought.

Perhaps they really wanted to continue observing the place for several more

days.

“Still, can’t we scout safely with [Invisibility]?”

“—I’d thought of that as well. However, since a troublesome situation might

arise, it would be better to go in all at once, so at least we’d be able to learn

something.”

[Invisibility] spells were not perfect; there were many ways to see through

them. If the Workers approached with magic, and they were spotted by someone

— by the tomb’s sentries — it would raise their alertness level, and they might

not be able to enter at all for the next few days.

In order to avoid that, they opted for a plan where everyone would go in

together.

Hekkeran understood that point and nodded. While there were still some

holes in the plan, this was the best balance they could strike between risk and

effectiveness.

“In that case, we’ll be resting for now?”

“—Yes, Darkness and Screaming Whip will be in charge of security; but for

safety’s sake and to keep everyone on their toes, the various teams will be

assigning sentries to keep an eye on things. We’re going in order of arrival at the

Count’s estate and rotating every two hours.”

“I see, so we’re the last, then.”

“—Yes, it’ll be a while before it’s our turn.”

Saying so, Arche cricked her neck and worked her shoulders.

“Thanks for your hard work.”

Arche nodded to Roberdyck.

“—I’m so tired. We spent so much time because that idiot wanted to just

barge into the ruins. It took us a lot of time to talk him down. That man doesn’t

know the meaning of teamwork at all.”

“…Ah, that sword genius guy…”

“Just call him Goddamn Son-of-a-bitch.”

Hekkeran smiled to Imina — whose murderous intent was steaming off her

— and tried to change the topic.

“In that case, I’ll be heading back to the campsite to slowly await our turn.”

“I approve. I don’t think it’ll rain for a while, but we’d best prepare just in

case. Imina-san, it’s your turn, so please try not to look so scary.”

“Fine. Ahhhh~ it just pisses me off! I want to stab him to death. I’m pitching

my tent away from them.”

“As long as you stay within the designated campgrounds.”

It was not actually a good thing, but it was much better than pitching a tent

nearby and then getting into a fight.

The four of them turned their backs on the ruins and left the plains.

“—Still, the more I think about it, the stranger it seems. No wonder the Count

put out a request like this.”

The group turned around as they heard Arche’s voice, and saw her staring at

the ruins.

“I can’t tell the age or the background of these ruins at all. It’s as though they

just suddenly appeared in this era. It feels out of place. Those carvings look just

like the carvings in the region before the Demon Gods rampaged through this

area, but those carvings had an eastern flavor to them. And then there’s these

cross-shaped tombstones… no, I still don’t get it.”

As he listened to Arche’s scholarly dissertation, Hekkeran had to suppress the

wicked smile on his face and he barely managed to hide the excitement in his

heart.

“So you’re saying that we might find some very interesting treasure there,

then?”

“Yeah, I’m sure there’ll be some amazing treasure in there.”

“…Either that, or some very frightening undead.”

“—Uwah~ how scary~”

“—That’s a horrible imitation, Hekkeran. It doesn’t look like me at all. And

you’re trying to copy my voice too, that’s just gross.”

“Yes, sorry about that.”

“Still… I’m kind of looking forward to it.”

“Oh yes. Why does this tomb exist, and who was buried here? It piques my

curiosity.”

“That’s right. Exploring the unknown always gets me a little jumpy.”

“—And money. I hope there’s a lot of treasure.”

Hekkeran looked at the smiling faces of his companions, and satisfaction filled

his heart. While everyone here had done dirty jobs for money, it was not of their

own free will. In truth, everyone here preferred adventurer work.

There was no telling if Arche would be able to continue adventuring with them

once she had to start supporting her sisters. Once Arche left the team, it might

take a while to find their next member, and even if they found one, they would

have to take on easier jobs before they blended into the team.

Perhaps this job, as the last one with their current members, was the best

choice.

*In the future… maybe we can take adventuring jobs… like adventurers, no, it would*

*be good if we could go explore the unknown together.*

Hekkeran looked to the heavens, at the sprawling, boundless sky.

# 

●

# 

As sunset slowly shrouded the world, the Workers filed out of their cleverly

concealed low tents. As the ones charged with carrying out clandestine

operations, it was time for them to work.

The adventurers had already prepared a meal for them.

They started by lighting several white bricks of solid fuel, then added charcoal

to it. Since they had cast [Darkness] on the fire beforehand, there was no

illumination which would otherwise have lit up the surroundings. [Darkness]

only eliminated light; it did not extinguish flames. Then, they boiled the water

from a Pouch of Infinite Water over the lightless, yet vigorous blaze.

They poured the boiled water into wooden bowls, and the travel rations

within lost their shape, and a fragrant smell of soup steamed forth. That, along

with hard bread, was what everyone ate.

After that, it was up to personal preference.

The bowls were filled with yellowish soup — the type which Workers liked,

made to provide nutrition and to be stored for a long time. Some people would

add thin slices of jerky to the soup, some sprinkled spices onto it, and others

would simply consume it straight.

Dinner was over with that bowl of soup. When one considered the amount of

activity they would soon be performing, it seemed like a pitiful amount.

However, eating too much would affect their upcoming work, At the same

time, not eating enough was also dangerous, because there was no telling when

they would be able to eat again.

Their supply of emergency ration bars was also limited, because carrying too

many would hinder movement. A compromise had to be made in this area.

They handed the empty bowls to the adventurers, and then the Workers

shouldered their pre-packed bags.

Under the watchful eyes of the adventurers, the Workers set off in unison.

The adventurers would be guarding this campsite, and they would not follow

them to the ruins.

To begin with, they circled around the base of the hill, and then dispersed

around the ruins. They had already arranged to launch a flare into the sky if they

were attacked at this stage.

Many people wore full plate armor, whose cumbersome bulk and noise did

not seem quite suitable for stealth operations, but that was only within the

constraints of normal thinking. For those who could use magic to violate

common sense, it was a trivial matter.

First, they cast [Silence]. This spell smothered all sounds within a certain

distance, be it the clanking of armor plates or that of running across the ground.

After that was [Invisibility]. That spell made it difficult for observers to detect

them with the naked eye.

For safety’s sake, they had a ranger in the air with [Invisibility], [Fly] and

[Hawk Eye] cast on him to keep an eye on their surroundings. He was equipped

with special arrows imbued with a paralysis effect to deal with any sudden

situation that might develop.

The group reached their destination under this double layer of protection.

It was time for the main event.

Their plan was to ascend the slope, then drop down onto the ruins several

meters below. Then, they would search the surface portion and then meet up at

the central mausoleum. All this had to be done while the [Invisibility] spells were

still in effect.

That said, everyone had to move in sync in order to keep people from going

off-script. However, it was late at night, and everyone was invisible, so it would

be very difficult to verify each other’s location.

However, they had already taken that problem into consideration.

Strange sticks, each about 30 centimeters long, suddenly appeared on the

ground. The sticks floated into the air like someone was holding them, and after

they were bent, they glowed dimly.

These special sticks — glow sticks — could be bent, upon which the

alchemical solutions within would combine and emit light. The reason why they

had been dropped to the ground was because [Invisibility] also affected

everything the subject of the spell was carrying. In order to keep an item visible,

it had to be removed from the subject’s person.

The light shook back and forth a few times, and then the sticks broke, having

served their purpose. They then poured glowing alchemical solution onto the

ground and covered it up with dirt, neatly concealing it.

In this way, they learned that things were going smoothly for the Workers

everywhere, and that they were waiting for the next stage of the plan.

While they could not see each other due to the distance, four ropes were

simultaneously lowered to the surface of the Great Underground Tomb of

Nazarick. This was climbing rope, and it had knots tied at regular intervals along

its length.

The ends of the rope were tied to iron pitons sunk into the rock, and they

creaked as they swayed.

If anyone present could see through invisibility, they would be able to see a

group of people descending the ropes.

This much was nothing even for someone like Arche, who had focused on

honing her magical prowess over her physical body and had not learned much in

the way of athletic skills. Or rather, it would be better to say that both Workers

and adventurers needed at least that much physical training.

The training and the knots were put to good use as each Worker descended

without a problem, landing within the tomb grounds.

The first destination of each infiltration team was one of the four smaller

mausoleums in each direction.

Now that the effective duration of [Invisibility] was over, everyone came into

view again. Each team ran towards their respective mausoleum.

They were crouched low, concealing themselves with tombstones, trees or

statues, running through the darkened graveyard. During this time, the [Silence]

spell was still in effect, so they did not make any noise, and even the warriors in

full plate ran with all their might while seeking cover. Their movements were

swift and fluid, like shadows racing across the land.

# 

●

# 

Heavy Masher’s leader Gringam slowly approached the mausoleum, and his

eyes went wide.

That was because the mausoleum was grander than he had imagined.

While it was one of the smaller directional mausoleums, that was only in

comparison to the huge central mausoleum. At a closer look, the structure was

so impressive that its incredible grandeur made the breath catch in his throat.

The white stone walls gleamed like they had been planed flat. Many years

should have passed since it had been built, yet there was no trace of weathering

or stains from the wind and the rain.

A massive steel door stood atop a flight of three steps made from single slabs

of rock. The door itself was polished and free of rust, and glinted with a dark,

metallic light.

Just seeing this structure was enough to tell them how well it had been

maintained.

—In other words, the tomb was definitely occupied.

As Gringam reached that conclusion, the thief among his companions stepped

forward, and began inspecting the steps.

Gringam saw the thief gesture to him — because of the [Silence] spell — to

move away from him, and so he slowly backed off. This was to avoid being caught

in an area-of-effect trap.

The thief checked very carefully. It was somewhat frustrating, but it could not

be helped.

Apparently, people’s souls resided in their bodies, and when the body started

to decay, the soul would be summoned to the side of the gods. That was why the

dead were essentially buried in graveyards right away — in the embrace of the

earth — but this was different for certain nobles and those in power.

If one buried the body right away, verifying the decay of the body would

require an exhumation of the grave. Therefore, in order to personally verify the

decay of the deceased, these powerful people would not be buried immediately

after death, but left in state for a while. However, nobody would choose to put

their corpses in their own homes.

Instead, they would choose to have their bodies stored in the mausoleums of

the graveyards. The corpse would be placed there for a period of time, and once

the decay began, the priests would bear witness to the fact that the soul had, in

fact, departed the body to be with the gods.

The bodies in question would be placed within a communal space within the

mausoleum. There would be several stone slabs within a wide-open space and

the corpses would be laid out on the slabs. The sight of rotting cadavers laid out

in a row ought to have been a gruesome sight, but within this world’s frame of

reference, it was an exceedingly normal sight.

However, if one were as wealthy and powerful as a Great Noble, things would

once again be slightly different. They would not use a communal mausoleum,

but an ancestral tomb. People believed that these were temporary resting places

for the mighty to abide before they were summoned before the spirits of their

family, and so being able to possess a family mausoleum was a symbol of power.

It was not at all unusual to decorate mausoleums with furniture or jewelry. In

other words, mausoleums were essentially treasure troves for thieves.

Therefore, these places were typically fortified with lethal traps and the like to

ward off intruders.

Therefore, such a magnificent mausoleum must surely be laced with even

more dangerous traps.

After checking the steps, the thief began inspecting the door, and then

suddenly, the sounds around them returned to normal.

The duration of the [Silence] had expired, perhaps just in time. The thief

quietly crept towards the door, and began checking again. In the end, he rested

something like a cup against the door, and tried listening to what was beyond it.

After several seconds, the thief turned to Gringam and company and shook

his head.

In other words: “there’s nothing.”

The thief himself was quite surprised, and tilted his neck several times.

The door was not even locked, which defied understanding, but since the thief

had not found anything, it would be the frontliner’s turn after this.

Gringam stepped up, and reached out to push the door which the thief had

already oiled. The warrior behind him braced his shield as well.

With a forceful shove, the heavy door began moving. Perhaps it was the oil, or

because the people in charge of this place had been very meticulous in their

work, but the door slid open smoothly despite its massive weight.

The warrior standing by moved between the freshly opened door and

Gringam, bracing his shield forward, so Gringam would not be hit by an attack

or trap.

No arrows or the like flew at him. The metal door was now completely open,

and a vacuous darkness appeared before the members of Heavy Masher.

“[Continual Light].”

The staff which the arcane magic caster was holding glowed with magical

light. Through its variable, controllable illumination, they had a clear view of the

mausoleum’s interior. The magic caster incanted another spell, and the warrior’s

weapon glowed as well.

The twin sources of light illuminated what looked like a chamber belonging

to a member of royalty.

In the middle of the room was what looked like a religious altar, upon which

was placed a white stone sarcophagus. Said sarcophagus was over 2.5 meters long

and it was inscribed with delicate patterns. In the four corners of the room were

white statues of warriors in armor and carrying swords and shields.

And also—

“—Hm, does anyone know anything about that emblem?”

“No, I’ve never seen anything like that before.”

A flag hung from the wall. It had a strange crest stitched on it in thread-of-

gold. The thief and the magic caster knew most of the heraldry used by the

surrounding nations, so if they did not recall this particular crest, then it

probably did not belong to the Kingdom’s royalty.

“Could it be an emblem from nobles before the Kingdom was founded?”

“Thou meanst this is a relic from over two centuries ago?”

Many countries had been destroyed by the Demon Gods 200 years ago, and so

there were surprisingly few nations around here whose history lasted beyond

200 years. The Kingdom, the Holy Kingdom, the Council Alliance, and the

Empire had all been founded within the past 200 years.

“If that’s really the case, then what exactly is this flag made of, to remain in

the same beautiful shape despite its age?”

“Maybe someone used preservation magic on it, or someone used magic to

repair the aged portions.”

“That’s right. Say, leader, you don’t need to talk in that weird way anymore.

We’re the only ones here now.”

“Umu…”

Gringam’s eyebrows bent to a dangerous angle, and then his face promptly

broke into a smile.

“Ahhhhh, what a pain, thou this and meanst that, it’s all so stupid.”

“Thanks for your hard work. Still, he’s right; when it’s just us, you can speak

normally.”

“No, I can’t! Speaking stiffly and formally like that makes me sound more like

a great Worker. And besides, changing the way I speak here and there is a pain

in the ass, so I always speak like that on the job. That’s one of my principles; you

know that, right?”

Gringam answered his companions’ bitter smiles with a wry grin of his own.

Gringam had originally been the third son of a farmer in the Kingdom.

If farmers evenly divided their fields between each and every one of his

children over the generations, then the fields would shrink, which in turn would

cause the crop yield to dwindle until the family line ended. Therefore, as the

saying went, “dividing the fields” became synonymous with “foolishness.”

Because of that, the fields of a farming family typically went to the eldest son,

while the second son could choose to help with the housework and the fields,

but the third son would be nothing but a waste of space. Therefore they typically

chose to leave their homes and eke out a living in the city.

It was true that Gringam was blessed with exceptional physical abilities and

friends, with which he had made a name for himself. However, he had originally

been a farmer, and he was a second-rate piece of insurance to ensure the family

line continued at that, so he had no education. He could neither read nor write,

and he did not understand etiquette.

It was true that Workers needed the strength to complete their jobs, and not

education. However, there would be problems if he, as their leader, was ignorant.

He did his best to study, but his mind was not as capable as his body, and he

messed everything up. Even so, the reason why he had not been removed from

his position as leader was because his comrades approved of his performance,

academic abilities aside. In order not to disgrace these friends of his, Gringam

had chosen to speak in a weird way.

This would let their clients feel, “He’s advertising for his team, so there’s

nothing strange about him talking in a funny way.”

The fact was that people laughed at him for speaking in that way. However, it

was far better than letting others say, “A team led by a clueless farm boy won’t

amount to much.”

“Very well, we have tarried sufficiently. Let us be off, gentlemen.”

Nobody objected to Gringam’s declaration, and so they continued onward.

At their head was the thief, who carefully entered the mausoleum and

searched the interior.

The other team members wedged stout iron bars into the gaps of the door.

That way, no matter what kind of traps they sprang, the door would not close

completely. After that, they half-closed the doors to prevent light from escaping

the interior. While the thief carefully inspected the inside of the mausoleum,

Gringam and the others kept a close eye on their surroundings, taking pains not

to slack off. While it was necessary, they had still made light. Someone might

have spotted it.

As Gringam hunkered down to watch the surroundings outside, the thief had

already reached the bottom of the flag. After carefully examining the flag, he

made up his mind to touch it, and in the instant he did, he immediately shrank

away from it.

“It’s okay for now, so come in, everyone.”

The thief looked back, and after seeing that Gringam and company had

entered the mausoleum, he pointed to the flag.

“…This ought to be worth a pretty penny; it’s been woven from threads of

precious metal.”

“Whhaaaaaat?! Threads of precious metal? Are they mad, to hang such a thing

here?”

Everyone exclaimed in surprise. Then, they rushed to the base of the flag and

took turns to feel it up. The cold sensation was undoubtedly that of metal.

From the way it gleamed, the thief was probably correct. A flag of that size

ought to be very heavy, and after factoring its artistic worth, it must be worth a

fortune.

“It would seem our client’s bet paid off. While he has not yet made back the

payment to us… no, to our four teams, there must surely be much treasure in a

place like this.”

“Are we going to take it with us?”

Gringam replied to the thief:

“T’would be too bulky, and most weighty. We shall collect it later. Does

anyone disagree?”

“Nope, carrying this around really would weigh us down. Also, I’ve searched

this place; there’s no traps here, or secret doors.”

“…Then, I shall leave it to thee.”

Gringam nodded to the arcane magic caster — the wizard — and his colleague

cast a spell in response.

“[Detect Magic] — I can’t sense any magical mechanisms around, unless

they’re hidden by concealing spells.”

“…Then there is nothing else to inspect. Let us continue with our prime

directive.”

Everyone’s eyes went to the sarcophagus in the center of the room.

The thief spent a long time inspecting it, and judged that there were no traps.

Gringam and the warrior nodded to each other, and then they pushed open

the lid of the sarcophagus. The lid was massive, and they thought that it would

be equally heavy, but it was much lighter than they expected. The two of them

put their backs into pushing it and nearly lost their balance.

After pushing open the sarcophagus lid, the contents reflected the light and

emitted a blinding, sparkling radiance.

There were ornaments and jewelry of gold and silver and various gemstones.

There were over a hundred gold coins within the sarcophagus at a glance.

While he had expected something like this when they saw the flag, Gringam

could not help but break into a smile as he saw all this. The thief carefully

examined the interior, then reached into the sarcophagus and took out a piece

of gleaming treasure — a gold necklace.

It was a breathtakingly beautiful marvel of craftsmanship. At a glance, the gold

necklace looked like an ordinary necklace, but the chains were each carved with

exquisite inscriptions.

“…It’s worth at least a hundred gold coins. You’d be able to get 150 for it no

problem, no matter where you sold it.”

Everyone reacted differently when they heard the results of the thief’s

appraisal. Some of them whistled, some smiled so widely they could not close

their mouths. What they all had in common was that their eyes were filled with

the flames of delight and desire.

“We already arranged to get half of this, so at the very least, we’ve already

made 50 coins. 10 per person. What a score!”

“Looks like… these ruins might end up being a treasure trove after all.”

“Marvelous! This is just amazing!”

“Exactly, but leaving all that treasure here is too much of a waste. We should

make good use of it.”

As he said this, the wizard reached into the pile of treasure and took out a ring

socketed with a massive ruby, which he kissed.

“It’s huge.”

The priest reached into the sarcophagus and pulled back a fistful of gold coins,

which he slowly let slip between his fingers.

The coins clinked against each other with a clear, crisp sound.

“I’ve never seen gold coins like these before. Which era and which country did

they come from?”

The thief nicked one of the coins with a knife, and said in a voice filled with

emotion:

“These gold coins are really high quality. They’re twice the weight of the

standard trading coin, and you could probably get even more just from their

artistic value alone.

“This really is… ku… kukuku…”

The group could not control themselves and broke into quiet laughter. Just

their share of this treasure alone would be a startling sum.

“You lot, thank the gods for your good fortune later. Let us take this treasure

with us and discover the true trove. If we tarry, we shall not have a share of it.”

—Alright!”

Gringam’s words were met with boisterous approval. Their voices were filled

with excitement and passion.

# *4*

# 

# 

# 

They were at the central mausoleum. It was surrounded by statues of gigantic

warriors and knights which looked like they were protecting their liege lord.

They were so realistic that they looked like they might move at any moment.

Hekkeran was hidden by the foot of one of the warrior statues, keeping a close

eye on one of the four smaller mausoleums.

After some time, Hekkeran noticed five people running over at top speed from

one of the mausoleums. He continued hiding, inspecting the running people for

any abnormalities, and also whether anyone was observing them. After that,

once he had confirmed that the running people were fine, Hekkeran finally

breathed a quiet sigh of relief.

He leaned out from behind the statue and flashed a signal. Gringam — who

was running at the head of his group — noticed it and ran toward Hekkeran.

“Gringam, what took you so long?”

“My sincerest apologies; it seems I have kept thee waiting.”

“Well, it’s not like we arranged a meeting time, so it’s fine. That aside, let’s

move to a different place and decide what we’ll do next.”

Hekkeran lowered his stance, leading the way even as he kept an eye on his

surroundings.

Shortly after they began moving, Gringam asked:

“A question, if I might; has thy team discovered treasure?”

After hearing the barely concealed excitement in Gringam’s voice, Hekkeran

recalled the way his own team had been, and smiled to him in satisfaction.

“Oh yes, we did. We were all smiles. The old man said so too.”

“So that was thy experience as well? Truly, we did well coming to this tomb.”

“Indeed, we should properly thank whichever big shot was buried here.”

“Mm. That said, after discovering so much treasure, we might have to prepare

ourselves for the possibility that the main tomb will be barren.”

“No, I’m willing to bet that there’ll be more treasure.”

“Thy words… how much dare you wager?”

“Not bad. Not only can I find more in the tomb, but I can make a tidy sum off

you as well, wonderful. However, the problem is that you and I might bet on the

same thing.”

Neither of them laughed out loud, simply smiled broadly.

“Indubitably. Speaking of which, this one has a question to ask of thee; what

is that?”

Before Gringam’s eyes was a massive statue, which had something which

looked like a lonely stone plaque by its feet.

“You mean that?”

Hekkeran told the results of their investigations as they continued walking.

The other three teams had seen the characters on the slab, but nobody

understood it. He had the faint hope that Gringam might be able to make sense

of it.

“It seems to be a stone plaque with symbols that look like language inscribed

on it.”

“Thou say’st the word ‘like’ in a vague sense…?”

“Nobody understands that language. It’s not from the Kingdom or the

Empire’s language, and neither does it seem to be any of the old languages from

around here. It might not even be a human language. However, we did

understand the number 2.0.”

“A number? Logically speaking, that ought to be the date when the mausoleum

was built. But in that case, it would be far too small a number.”

“Arche said it might be a riddle linked to these ruins… ah, in any case, just

keep it in mind.”

“Indeed, I shall certainly do so.”

After passing the huge statue, they ascended a long, gently sloping flight of

stairs that seemed to be made of the same material as the stone sarcophagus,

and the entrance to the central mausoleum stretched before them.

“‘Tis the stench of the dead.”

“Yes, you’re right. It’s a common smell on the Katze Plains.”

Hekkeran expressed his agreement with Gringam’s muttering.

While it was not as nauseating as the vile odor of decay, the faint stench of

undeath unique to graveyards hung in the cold air.

There were undead present in such a well-kept tomb.

The group prepared themselves as they stepped into the mausoleum. Before

them was a great hall. Countless mortuary slabs of stone lined either side of the

hall, and opposite them was a staircase leading down. The door leading

downstairs was wide open. A strangely chilling gust of ice-cold air flowed out

from behind it.

“This way.”

Led by Hekkeran, Gringam’s group descended the stairs.

A burial vault lay at the foot of the stairs, with a set of doors straight ahead. It

seemed to be the only one around.

While it was more cramped than the room above — the mausoleum — it was

wide enough. Hekkeran’s companions in Foresight, Eruya’s Tenbu and

Palpatra’s group were all here.

“Now then, what shall we do next? The original plan was to split up here and

investigate the interior, but after inspecting the mausoleums, do you have any

other ideas?”

After saying so, Hekkeran looked around at everyone else.

It did not feel like anyone wanted to propose anything new. Was it desire, or

just a simple trick of the light? He could not be sure what that glow in everyone’s

eyes was. Their faces were filled with excitement as they longed to rush into the

depths of the tomb.

“In that case, I have a suggestion. We’ll sweep the outside in a circle to check

for hidden doors.”

The team leader might have spoken, but the team members did not look happy

at it.

After all, they had all seen the glittering prizes just now. Even if that opinion

came from their veteran leader, it was very hard for them to go along with it.

Surely, they must have imagined the treasure fleeing before their very eyes.

“How about it? We’ve checked the surface, but we can’t say we checked it very

thoroughly. There might be other routes hidden beneath the mausoleums, don’t

you think? Besides, we haven’t checked the graveyard, have we?”

“I believe what the revered elder is trying to say is that according to the songs

of the bards about the great ruins — that is to say, the Ruins of Sasashal — there

was a safe passage near the entrance which could take everyone straight to the

heart of the area.”

“Ah, Gringam. We’ve checked already, but unfortunately there aren’t any

secret doors in this room.”

“Precisely. We’re willing to take one for the team, so in exchange, we hope

you’ll give us a share of the treasures you find on this level. How about 10% from

each other team? Also, if you find another level below, can we ask for the right

to go in and look first?”

“I have no objections to that proposal.”

The first to reply was Gringam. Shortly after that, Hekkeran also expressed

his agreement.

“Alright, it seems nobody objects! By the way, how about you, Uzruth?”

“Personally, I object very much, but it’s only 10%, hardly a big deal.”

The old man laughed merrily at Eruya’s barbed reply. It was Eruya who was

displeased by having his acidic words completely disregarded.

“Ah, old sir. In that case, we have a request for you. We found a huge flag

woven of precious metal threads in the mausoleum we investigated. We didn’t

bring it along because it was too bulky. Can we trouble you to help us bring it

back?”

“I concur with Hekkeran’s opinion. Though it shames me to trouble thee, I

would be glad if thou couldst help us recover ours as well.”

“Since it’s that way, we’ll leave ours to you as well.”

Eruya jerked his chin at one of the Elves, and the skinny girl shakily unloaded

a large piece of cloth she was carrying on her back and laid it on the ground.

“Understood. Is there anything else you wish to leave behind, or which you

want us to take away?”

Nobody answered Palpatra’s question.

“Alright! Then, we’ll follow the suggestion just now and investigate the

surface. You lot need to be careful too. However, if you find any valuables, feel

free to leave them for us.”

“Haha, revered elder. Gladly will we leave the monsters to thee, but

regretfully, we will not leave so much as a single coin of treasure behind.”

The group chuckled, and then Hekkeran asked everyone: “Then, shall we

move out?”

The group accepted that suggestion immediately, and so they went forth.

Their eyes gleamed with desire and expectation as they took their first step into

the unknown ruins — the underground tomb.

After opening the door in the room, a passage led straight into the depths.

Perhaps they should have expected this, but the passage was very clean.

This was a passage of stone with no mildew or algae growing on it. There were

alcoves on either side, each filled with human-sized objects wrapped in funerary

shrouds. There was none of the stench that was unique to corpses. There was

just the cold, clear air, as well as a smell like that of the dead.

There were white lights spaced along the ceiling at regular intervals, but due

to the great distance between them, there were still a lot of shadowy corners

along the passage. While it did not affect their travels, the dimly lit lamplight

made them wonder if they had missed something. Moving without preparing

illumination seemed quite dangerous.

“Rober, is there an undead reaction from that body?”

“No, none at all.”

“Really?” Arche replied, and then walked over to a wrapped corpse, slicing the

shroud open with a dagger. After seeing her actions, two of the men from the

group stepped forward to help expose the cadaver underneath the shrouds.

“Judging by the height and physique, it’s most likely human. And a grown

male.”

“He’s not wearing clothes, so we can’t tell which era the ruins came from.”

“Still, these ruins really are a mystery. We can’t tell its age from its

architecture or the burial styles. For all we know, these ruins might be from over

600 years ago.”

“—If that were really the case, then this would be a historic find.”

Perhaps that topic might have been interesting to an academic, but they were

here to work.

As Hekkeran and Gringam stared icily at them, the three quickly added:

“These ruins’ date of construction and background are still a mystery, after all.”

“Understood. Can we move on now? I want to kill monsters.”

The somewhat displeased Eruya expressed his agreement with Hekkeran and

Gringam, and the group continued forward again. However, they stopped again

after taking a few steps.

Everyone drew their weapons, steeling themselves for combat.

The sound of bones rattling came from ahead of them.

They could see undead creatures running at them from ahead under the

illumination of the ceiling lights.

As the distance between them shrank and they saw what they were up against,

a commotion rose from the shocked Workers, as though they had seen

something they did not dare believe.

“Oh come on, are you kidding me…”

“Oi, oi, seriously…?”

“Eh? Are those really Skeletons?”

The moment someone mentioned the names of those monsters, their

laughter exploded forth uncontrollably to fill the entire passageway.

“Oi oi oi oi! No matter how you look at it, Skeletons just won’t be enough,

right? There’s all of us over here!”

Skeleton-type monsters did not vary too much in appearance, and sometimes,

one might not be able to tell them apart at a glance.

However, judging by the impression they gave, the Workers were certain that

these were just ordinary Skeletons.

“If this is supposed to be a recon in force, then they ought to be sending

stronger monsters — I’ve got it! Either nobody’s in charge of these ruins, or the

opposition can’t gauge our strength, or they’re stupid enough that they haven’t

discovered the intruders yet!”

Everyone’s laughter continued.

“No, Skeletons are just too far-fetched. For all we know, the treasures of these

ruins are only in the mausoleums above.”

“That would be terrible.”

Skeletons were far too weak in comparison to these Workers, who were

comparable to mythril-ranked adventurers. In addition, they were fewer in

number than the Workers, so they had no idea what the opposition was thinking.

Faced with the six Skeletons blocking their path, everyone looked at each

other, not knowing who should go first.

“Count me out.”

Eruya clearly stated his opinion, and everyone could understand how he felt.

“Then I shall go.”

After that, Gringam strode forward.

There was no telling what was going through the Skeletons’ empty heads. Did

they think the lone warrior had been cast out of his group? Or something else?

The Skeletons attacked at once, and then—

His cleaving axe and shield easily smashed them to bits.

It had only taken the space of a few seconds. No, in fact it had been even less

than that.

After shattering the six Skeletons and treading their remains underfoot,

Gringam sighed tiredly. It was not because he had been fatigued by battle, but

because he was very disappointed by the fact that after coming to these

unexplored ruins which were a Worker’s dream, the very first battle which was

supposed to add color and flavor to this adventure had turned out to be against

Skeletons, the lowest-ranking of the undead. He found it quite sad.

“Pathetic, Skeletons are just Skeletons, after all. That said, don’t get careless.

Consider that more powerful undead might show up, and advance while staying

alert!”

Everyone’s lips drew tight as they heard Gringam’s words. They advanced,

deeper into the ruins, their hearts filled with expectation for the mountain of

treasure that awaited them.

# 

●

# 

“Good grief, they’re gone.”

“They’re all gone. They might be Workers, but we did break bread with them,

and they’re our comrades for this job. I hope they’ll come back safely… what do

you think, Momon-san?”

“—That they’re all going to die?”

Ainz answered in gloomy tones, and the leader of the adventurers who had

questioned him froze up.

*Crap. I said what was in my heart…*

“Er, no, what I meant was that we should be mentally prepared for that

outcome. These are previously undiscovered, and there’s no telling what dangers

are waiting for them inside. Being too optimistic is harmful.”

“I see, so that’s what you meant… thanks for your concern.”

*…I thought I was being pretty stiff, did that actually pass muster? I feel pretty good*

*about this.*

The leader was probably nodding non-stop because those words were spoken

by an adamantite-ranked man, so he was blindly thinking the best of him.

It would seem that Ainz’s efforts — he had been as friendly and approachable

as possible during their journey to Nazarick — had borne fruit, given their

favorable attitude towards him.

“Then, in keeping with the plan, I will go rest first.”

Ainz headed for his — naturally, he shared it with Narberal — tent. Since it

was some distance away from the other tents, he knew some people had been

spreading rumors that it was because he did not want certain… sounds to be

heard by others. In fact, the adventurers’ leader had told him that just now.

Compared to the Workers, the leader seemed to want to become closer to

Momon, who was a fellow adventurer, which was why he had told him what he

had heard from the Workers.

Ainz and Narberal entered the tent together and closed the flap, and then just

in case, they checked around outside. Nobody seemed to be paying attention to

them; in fact, they seemed to be deliberately trying not to stare at Ainz.

“…While people call this a love nest, I guess I was right to not deny it right

away. That way, they won’t be suspicious of why we pitched our tent so far away,

and they won’t pay undue attention to us or come near this place.”

He might have lost some things, but he had gained much more in return.

Ainz took off his helmet, exposing his skeletal face.

“Now then, Nabe… no, Narberal, I will be returning to Nazarick. I plan to have

Pandora’s Actor take my place; if anything happens before that, think of a clever

way to deal with it.”

“Understood, Ainz-sama.”

“Mm. If anything happens, contact me immediately. I’ll leave that to you.”

Ainz dismissed his magically created armor and swords. The weight of the

helmet in his hands vanished as well.

He did not feel tired, but after being liberated from the full-body bindings of

his armor, he could not help but sigh contentedly. He rotated his shoulders —

which did not ache — as a remnant of his human personality.

“…Good grief.”

He felt that the lingering shreds of his human feelings were an impediment to

him.

If he could calmly deal with all his problems, perhaps his present

circumstances would be different. But if he did not have the remnants of his

humanity with him, would he still cherish the Great Underground Tomb of

Nazarick? Perhaps his thoughts as the human being Suzuki Satoru and his fond

memories of his friends would have vanished with it.

Ainz smiled bitterly as he cast a spell. There was no part of his mind that still

pondered the question of his humanity. Ainz was not a great enough person to

worry about two or three problems at the same time and what he should do

about them. He ought to be focusing on the task at hand and discarding

everything else.

The spell he cast was [Greater Teleportation].

Because he was wearing the Ring, Ainz bypassed the barrier deployed over

Nazarick and arrived immediately at the chamber before the Throne Room.

“Welcome home, Ainz-sama.”

Right after that, a melodious female voice greeted him.

“I’ve returned, Albedo.”

The deeply bowed woman raised her head, and a smile like a flower blooming

spread across her ravishing features.

*Uhhhh…*

As he saw the look of loving adoration in her eyes, Ainz felt itchy all over and

he wanted to roll around on the ground. However, he could not act in a way

which did not fit Ainz Ooal Gown, sovereign of the Great Underground Tomb

of Nazarick.

In order to suppress the weak, lingering emotions within himself, Ainz

deliberately coughed, something that his skeletal body should not have required.

“If all is proceeding according to plan, the invaders should arrive soon. No,

perhaps they have already arrived. Have the welcome preparations been made?”

“They are flawless. I am certain we will be able to entertain our guests.”

“Is that so… Albedo, I look forward to the reception you have prepared.”

Ainz entered the heart of Nazarick; the Throne Room. Albedo was a step

behind him, but soon caught up.

Ainz had given Albedo an order concerning the intruders this time round. He

had expressed the desire to observe the performance of the defenses she had

erected under live battle conditions.

In the past, his friends had decided where the POP monsters would spawn in

Nazarick and where to station the monsters. His friends’ arrangements were

flawless. But now that the situation had changed, there was no guarantee that

there might not be a better way.

In that case, one could say that re-evaluating the security arrangements was a

pressing necessity. Therefore, he wanted to take this opportunity to observe it

for himself.

“…The intruders are very weak, so obviously it will be impossible to use them

to verify all the systems. Still, I hope we will learn something from this

operation.”

“Understood. I guarantee I will meet your expectations, Ainz-sama.”

“Very good. Also, as you know, spraying poison gas on the enemy before the

undead charge them and other currency-utilizing traps are to be strenuously

avoided. I hope you will stick to traps that involve the POP monsters. Will that

be alright?”

Ainz nodded as he saw Albedo’s smile.

“Really now? Then I shall stay here and enjoy the show. Right, where are the

other Floor Guardians?”

“I ordered everyone to gather upon your return. They will enter as they arrive.

Is that acceptable?”

“I shall allow it. After all, it is more amusing when more people are gathered.”

As Ainz slowly sat down upon the throne, several television monitor-like

objects appeared before him. The monitors showed scenes from within

Nazarick; or in other words, the scenes which their controller Albedo wanted

Ainz to see.

This should have been the result of Albedo’s tinkering with the defense

network, but Ainz was not quite sure what had been changed.

*…In order for this training exercise to be fruitful, I need to learn something from*

*these images. Otherwise, things will go badly when the exercise is concluded and we*

*swap opinions.*

Ainz was the supreme ruler of Nazarick. Such a highly placed man could not

claim ignorance of the defensive systems to his own subordinates.

“Then, just in case, I’d like to confirm that Ariadne won’t activate, will it?”

He opened the control console and saw that all was well, but he still could not

help asking.

“I don’t think so. However, I have a question for you, Ainz-sama. If the

intruders block up the entrance, will Ariadne activate?

Ainz recalled Q&As he had seen before in *Yggdrasil.* Or no, had it been

explained in a patch?

“I don’t think so… I remember it shouldn’t… I think.”

It had been that way in *Yggdrasil,* but nobody could guarantee that it would

still be that way in this world. Besides, they could not be sure if the Ariadne

system even existed.

“Then what if there was some sort of man-made manipulation? What would

happen?”

“It might not activate, but after thinking about the losses we’ll take if it does,

I’d rather not take that risk.

The Ariadne system.

This was one of the checking mechanisms involved in the *Yggdrasil* base

creation system.

The simplest way to make an impregnable fortress was to simply block up all

the entrances so nobody could get in. For a large underground tomb like

Nazarick, simply burying it underground would suffice. However, that was

intolerable from a gameplay perspective.

The Ariadne system was used to monitor them in order to keep Players from

building a base like that, which was difficult to invade.

The system specifications required that there be a continuous path from the

entrance to the heart of the dungeon. That aside, the Ariadne system would also

measure the distance traveled within the dungeon, the number of doors one had

to pass through, and many other categories, all in exacting detail.

Once a dungeon which violated these requirements was uploaded to *Yggdrasil,*

a penalty would be levied and a great deal of funds would be deducted from the

guild coffers.

For Nazarick, the Fifth and Sixth Floors had solved all these problems — that,

and the help of a great deal of cash items had helped them sustain such a large

dungeon.

One of the monitors which Ainz was controlling showed an image of the

Workers.

“Cheh! Alright, they’ve finally entered. I was getting tired of waiting.”

Ainz was deeply displeased to see these low-lives enter the fortress he had

built with his comrades, staining it with their filthy feet. Therefore, the surge of

emotion within him exceeded the cutoff point, and he was immediately calmed

down. Even so, it could not fully bank the flames of his aggravation.

“Albedo, not a single one of them is to escape intact, do you understand?”

“But of course. Please enjoy the fate that will befall these foolish thieves who

dare profane the sanctuary of the Supreme Beings. Also… I believe you said

earlier that you wanted lab rats to test your swordsmanship with. Which lot shall

we use?”

“Hmm, that’s right. I’ve sparred with the old man before, I’ve practiced with

that man on the road, and this team isn’t suitable for practice. By process of

elimination, it has to be them.”

Ainz shifted the monitor so Albedo could see, and pointed to a group of

people.



# Chapter 3 The Great Tomb

Chapter 3 | The Great Tomb

## 

## 

## 

## 

# 

# *1*

# 

# 

# 

The Worker team led by “Green Leaf” Palpatra bade farewell to the others —

who were driven by anticipation and desire — and then looked down upon the

outside from the stairs leading to the central mausoleum’s entrance.

Nothing stirred under their eyes as they swept them across the silent

graveyard. The only things there were silence, darkness and starlight. As

Palpatra took a step towards the stairs, his companions said:

“Gramps, don’t you think this is a bit of a shame? We should have let the other

teams search the graveyard, no?”

“You’re right. Every team… well, that piece-of-shit team aside, the others have

roughly the same abilities. Anything we can do, Heavy Masher or Foresight can

do too.”

“In that case…”

Palpatra interrupted his companion halfway through his words and said:

“But we have priority searching rights for tomorrow, so we aren’t losing out

on anything. Besides, we ought to have finished the surface investigation by

then, and if they’re unlucky, the last team might not be able to find anything,

and they might even be posted to guard the base camp.”

“I see…”

“Besides, going first into a mysterious set of ruins is far too dangerous.

They’re like mining canaries for us, though hopefully they’ll come back alive.”

Palpatra turned back, a cold look in his eyes. The Workers who had charged

into the ruins had disappeared in the direction he was looking.

There was a hint of disdain on his face, completely unlike the benign old man

who was called “gramps” by others. However, his teammates knew him well, and

they were not alarmed.

Palpatra had a very meticulous personality. He was a man who thought and

thought again, the kind who would tap a stone bridge to test it before crossing.

That was why he had been able to adventure on the frontlines for so long and

even slay a Dragon. On the other hand, his excessively nitpicky personality

meant that he had missed several chances for gain. However, he had never once

lost any of his companions, and so everyone on his team trusted him.

To just about anyone, nothing was more valuable than one’s life. Even so, they

could not help but envy the treasure that had slipped through their fingers.

“We might have missed the chance to discover amazing magic items! What’s

wrong with betting our lives on that?”

“You do have a point. However, look at this neat and tidy graveyard.

Someone’s clearly tidying it up, which means monsters will be coming out to

welcome us. Isn’t it better to let the others see what kind of monsters there are?

Personally, I didn’t really like this job because there were too many uncertain

factors.”

After hearing Palpatra grumble, his team members lightly asked:

“But you still took it in the end, right?”

“Of course. That’s because the other teams accepted it too. I felt that we could

flee while they sacrificed themselves for us.”

The group descended the stairs and reached the ground.

“Is that why you chose to search the surface? So you could run once you heard

them scream?”

“That’s one of the reasons, and the fact is my way of thinking was a bit of a

gamble… Just like you said just now, we might end up losing out because of this.

We’ll be safer if we can gather more information, but the fact is that I don’t know

if that’s really so great an advantage. If I’m wrong, then I’ll apologize to you all

for it.”

“Don’t worry about it, gramps. We’ve always trusted you, because for the most

part, your choices were always right.”

“Besides, even if we end up losing out here, all we need to do is knuckle down

and find another job with a big payout. You’ve said it before, haven’t you,

gramps? As long as you live, there’s always a chance, so there’s no need to force

yourself to take risks.”

“Man, those were the days. We were all young back then.”

“Aren’t you still young now?”

“Hah, it’s not very convincing when you say I’m young, gramps.”

The group flashed wry grins to each other as they headed towards the small

mausoleum.

“That said, I should have discussed this with you all first, but I ended up

making the decision on your behalf. Sorry about that.”

“Well, that’s the only way you could have expressed it back then. Besides,

you’re the team leader we chose, gramps. When our trusted leader makes a

decision, we’re all happy to obey.”

“…You were all moping back there, what are you grinning about now? Alright,

that’s fine. Let’s hurry up and check, and if we have time left over, I’ll see if

Momon-dono can give me a few pointers. It’s a rare chance, so maybe you can

have him teach you a thing or two.”

“Mm, we’ve engraved your spar with him into our eyes, gramps. That’s an

adamantite-ranker for you.”

“…There are many kinds of adamantite-ranked adventurers. Eight Ripples of

the Empire is, frankly speaking, not really adamantite-ranked. Momon-dono is a

true adamantite-ranked adventurer. He’s on a level I can’t hope to reach.”

“Gramps…”

“Hyahyahya, don’t worry. When I was in my prime, I might have been jealous,

but now I’m just a wrinkly old coot. It’s not like I’m shocked or anything.

Besides, I’ve seen several true adamantite-ranked adventurers in my time, but

Momon-dono is unique even among them. From his presence, he feels like an

adamantite among adamantites.”

“Really?”

“Oh yes, which is why I’m telling you to get some pointers from him. After I

die, gaining experience will be helpful if you want to continue adventuring.”

“How could you possibly die, gramps? I can’t even bring myself to imagine you

retiring.”

“Exactly. You’re hale and hearty, so living to Fluder-san’s age shouldn’t be

problem, right gramps?”

“Hyahyahya, no, no, not even I could do something like that. The man’s an

oddity.”

“What a wonderful team you have.”

A woman’s quiet voice suddenly reached their ears.

The only women among the members of this expedition were the two ladies

from Hekkeran’s Foresight and the three Elf slaves from Eruya’s Tenbu.

However, the voice did not belong to any of them.

The group immediately raised their weapons, and turned back.

As they looked up the stairs they had just descended, they saw a group of

women in maid uniforms standing at the entrance to the mausoleum. There

were five of them in total.

Each of them was unbelievably beautiful, but at the same time it also made

them especially abnormal.

The strange thing was that each of them was dressed in an outfit that

resembled a maid’s uniform, but they were different from the clothes Palpatra

had seen before; they gleamed with an armor-like sheen.

“You… who are you? I didn’t see you just… oh, so there *was* a hidden passage

after all.”

“Women? They’re beautiful enough to rival the ‘Beautiful Princess’ of

Darkness… they’re clearly not ordinary people”

“They don’t seem hostile, but… they can’t possibly be people who were hired

in addition to ourselves.”

“What should we do, gramps?”

His comrades dared not be careless. They observed the girls closely as they

asked him.

The best option would be to negotiate with them, but it would seem they

would not be able to conclude this amicably.

“Our numbers are roughly even… so we should just be able to handle it, right?”

Their opponents’ strength ought to be about the same as themselves, or

slightly higher.

They had not attacked while the Workers were gathered together in order to

get them all in one fell swoop. That implied they lacked the fighting power or

traps to deal with so many people at once. At the same time, they had chosen to

show up and show themselves off and initiate the conversation; that implied

they were confident of defeating Palpatra’s group.

While his aged body hardly sweated any more, at this moment, Palpatra felt

the hand gripping his spear turn cold and clammy.

“Still, maids showing up in a tomb… really calls their taste into question.

In the next moment, the friend of his who had tossed off that casual joke was

suddenly covered in cold sweat, his face pale and trembling.

Palpatra thought the temperature around him had plummeted for a moment.

However, the goosebumps covering his body were no delusion.

Even with only the light of the moon to illuminate them, he could clearly see

murder in the eyes of the maids lined up above him. It looked like their eyes were

glowing.

“LeT’s KiLL thEM.”

“…Have to die.”

“We can’t just kill them normally. We need to make their suffering legendary.”

An intense bloodlust roiled around the maids. Their anger was such that it felt

like the air itself was warping.

“Alright, alright,” the most senior-looking maid said with a clap of her hands.

“Our master has ordered us not to let any of them return unharmed, so we were

going to kill them anyway. However, I’m quite pleased to see everyone so

motivated.”

There was a *clang,* a sound of metal which seemed to come from the stairs that

had been cut from a slab of stone. The sound had come from the greave-like

metal high heels which the maids wore.

Shaken, Palpatra and company backed off.

Given their lack of weapons, their opposition ought to be magic casters. In

that case, allowing them to take the high ground and fighting in this wide-open

space which favored ranged weapons was not a wise strategy.

For Palpatra and the others, the ideal tactic for them was to shorten the

distance between themselves and the enemy. The reverse would be to the maids’

advantage. However, why were these maids coming down the stairs? Were they

planning to soar into the sky with [Fly] if anything happened?

The maids’ blank faces were like a mask, and their movements were as regal

as a sovereign as they slowly descended the stairs. Palpatra and his group were

at a loss for how to respond, but still, they sheltered behind their shields and

discussed what to do and what tactics to use.

*Clang!*

A particularly strident sound rang through the air. The maids had stopped

halfway down the steps.

“Alright, let’s start with a self-introduction. I… forgive me… this one is the

assistant leader of the Seven Sisters (Pleiades), Yuri Alpha. While we will not be

together for long, it was a pleasure to meet you. Now then, back to the main

topic, while wiping you out directly would be faster, we cannot make a move

ourselves for certain reasons. What a shame.”

The wind carried adorable, bell-like laughter over to them.

The smiles of these stunningly beautiful maidens overflowed with a charm

that instantly seized the hearts of anyone who looked upon them.

Being a former adventurer and currently a Worker, Palpatra had seen all sorts

of things over the years. Among them were supernaturally alluring monsters like

Fairies and so on. Yet even he had never seen such beautiful maidens before,

whose fair features seemed to ensnare his very soul.

However, their scornful words overflowed with a sense of superiority, and

below the thin veneer of their fair features was arrogance which belonged to the

overwhelmingly powerful. For these men, who had walked hand in hand with

death and who were very proud of their abilities, such high-handedness was

utterly intolerable. It even made them want to show the maids exactly who they

were looking down upon.

However, they had witnessed various indirect pieces of evidence which

suggested that these maids were incredibly powerful, in contrast to their

adorable appearances. Their faces were still filled with terror from the

murderous intent they had felt just now, and they could not fully steel

themselves for battle.

The best option might be to run, and let the adventurers — especially Momon

— join the fight.

“Then, allow me to introduce your opponents.”

Yuri clapped, and the graveyard trembled, as though in response to the

echoing sound.

“Come forth, Nazarick Old Guarders.”

“What?” Palpatra exclaimed in shock.

The earth behind him split open and several Skeletons showed themselves.

*A pincer attack? No…*

Looking up, he saw that the maids were still hostile, but they had no desire to

fight. Perhaps they were in a spectator mode. While they could not be careless,

it seemed to be as the maids had just said; they did not wish to attack right away.

Palpatra came to the conclusion that the only enemies in their way were the

Skeletons behind them, and so he began assessing the new batch of enemies.

Skeletons were hardly powerful opponents. Given the strength of Palpatra

and his group, they could take on a few hundred of them with no problems. That

being the case, the Skeletons that had emerged from the earth — eight of them

in total — were no match for them whatsoever.

However, there was a problem.

Palpatra’s companions gulped in unison and unconsciously backed up one

step.

These Skeletons felt different from regular Skeletons, and their equipment

was different too.

They were dressed in grand breastplates, like the sort a country’s royal guard

would use. Their shields were emblazoned with a Gryphon motif, and they

wielded all manner of weapons, in addition to composite longbows on their

backs. In addition, all this equipment glowed with the light of magical power.

Skeletons outfitted with magical gear could not be ordinary Skeletons.

“What are those?”

“You don’t know either, gramps? I’m not too sure… but I think they might be

an offshoot species of Skeleton Warriors.”

“An offshoot, huh? They don’t look like Red Skeleton Warriors either…”

Opponents one had never encountered before were always unsettling,

especially foes outfitted with magic items that possessed special effects.

“—These numbers should be enough to deal with you gentlemen. Please do

your best and show us how far you can run.”

“We’re honored that you’re sending out such powerful undead against us.

However…”

Palpatra calmly pondered the matter.

No matter what, they could not possibly have too many undead equipped with

so many magic items. They were probably using their strongest forces against

them right off the bat.

Otherwise, they would not have let them enter the ruins; they would have

dealt with them long ago.

“—So these are the strongest fighters of the ruins, then? You think they’re

enough to stop us?”

Looking up, Palpatra saw that Yuri seemed shaken by his question, her eyes

roaming about.

*I hit the nail on the head! I see. So they already laid a trap during our conversation…*

The wisest way to use their best troops was to neutralize each group of

intruders piecemeal. Of course, after considering that they might not be able to

match their opposition, it might be smarter to concentrate their forces where a

group of people would be after completing their explorations, when they were

physically and mentally fatigued; at the entrance, in other words.

And so, they had learned part of their opponents’ aim from this. When the

maid said, “show us how far you can run,” they were trying to bait them into

fleeing, so they would have a chance to attack them from behind. From the

maids’ point of view, they would be engaging in several battles, so they would

want to minimize any wear and tear to their forces.

Therefore, there was only one thing they had to do.

“So all we need to do is defeat these Skeletons and break out of this

encirclement, am I wrong?”

They had to defeat the Nazarick Old Guarders for the sake of the teams who

would be following them.

The other teams might be rivals, but comrades were comrades. Besides, if they

wanted them to flee, then standing and fighting would run a lower risk of falling

into a trap. And of course this was just in case, but he was thinking about asking

Momon to fight if their opposition was very strong. However, they ought to fight

now, even if there was risk.

“So I messed up the plan and now we’re the canaries instead… ah, what a pain.

Alright, do you think that’s all of them?”

“Given how well those undead are equipped, I can’t imagine there could be

more of them.”

“This is a route which invaders would have to pass through, so stationing their

best troops here would be the best tactic. That being the case, these Skeletons

should be all of them. And since the opposition should have better intelligence

than us, they probably aren’t dumb enough to split their forces.”

“…No, I think there ought to be a few more in the ruins. However the ones

left are probably lower-grade undead.”

“Gramps… we should flee. This is bad. It’s very bad.”

“We’ve already been surrounded, there’s no escape for us! Even if we try to

fly away, they’ll shoot us down with bows! Hang in there, lads! There’s no way

for us to survive but by defeating them!”

The response to Palpatra’s shout was a resigned yet surprised voice.

“Well, that’s also a valid means of breaking through. We’ll cheer for you, so

let’s begin.”

And with that, the Nazarick Old Guarders stepped forward.

# 

●

# 

Yuri and the others had troubled looks on their faces as they kept “cheering”

them on.

They had been hard-pressed to hide their consternation since the beginning.

*To think they were actually so…*

“Ahhh, this is bad ~su.”

“…Did not think it would be like this.”

“Cocytus-sama will be shocked.”

“IF tHIs keEPs Up… It’Ll ENd wiThoUt ANythINg To shOW fOr It.”

Yuri and the others watched a raised hammer swing down.

“Oh, that looks very bad, he’ll die ~su.”

Just as Lupusregina muttered to herself, the man in question took a blow to

the chest and crumpled to the ground.

The sound of metal scraping and a heavy object collapsing somehow managed

to fill the air despite the intense battle.

The first casualty was a human warrior, but the Nazarick Old Guarder holding

an electrically charged hammer did not seem particularly excited about it,

instead looking for another target.

“Priest-san, if you don’t heal him, he’ll die ~su”

“…No point. Died instantly, and battle line fell with him.”

Yuri muttered worriedly to herself, while Shizu shook her head as an answer.

The two Nazarick Old Guarders that the warrior had been holding off were

now freed up, so one went to deal with their priest while another one planned

to circle around to attack the backline. The priest was already occupied with two

of them, and now with another one to add to his burden, he no longer had the

time or energy to cast spells. He had his hands full just trying to fend off savage

attacks from three directions at once.

Palpatra was the only one who seemed to be earnestly giving battle, but he

had to deal with three enemies at once and did not have the freedom to help his

comrades.

“The thief’s firepower isn’t enough. I wonder if they have any trump cards?”

The thief fighting to protect the arcane magic caster now had one more enemy

to face. Now he had two. The thief’s light and nimble weaponry lacked decisive

power against his foes — the undead Nazarick Old Guarders who could not be

slain in one hit and who wore sturdy armor. The thief barely managed to avoid

their attacks with agile movements, but there was a great difference between the

untiring undead and human beings who could become fatigued.

“He’s looking at us like he’s about to cry ~su”

“Want to wave to him?”

“I guESS WAvinG To HIm wOUldN’t hURt.”

“Okay ~su”

Lupusregina smiled sweetly and waved to the man.

“…It hit him.”

“It’s all Lupu’s fault for distracting him.”

“Ueeehhhh~ It’s my fault ~su?”

“…Mm, your fault. But we can cheer for them… Yay.”

“Yes, I do hope they can hang in there a little longer.”

The maids nodded at Yuri’s words.

The Nazarick Old Guarders held the upper hand throughout the battle with

Palpatra’s team. At this point, this one-sided battle could be described as futile

resistance. Even Yuri and the others could not help but pity them.

At first, they had even laughed and said, “Weren’t you very confident in

yourselves before the battle started?” but then they had lost all interest and

started yawning, and now they were even rooting for Palpatra and the others.

“Uwah, the difference in their strength is so great I can’t think of anything to

say.”

“…No trump cards?”

“I think that summon spell they cast was it.”

“Third tier?”

“No, that’s too weak for a secret weapon. Although, using a summoned

monster as a meatshield was a pretty good idea.”

“Indeed. As long as they could keep attacks from connecting, they might have

been able to reorganize.”

“HOwEVeR, uSIng fLIGhT MAgiC aFter thAT wAS jUsT STuPId. DiDN’t that

wriNKLy old gEEzeR SAy sO hIMseLF?”

“I don’t know if he was planning to flee or use magic from above…”

“…He became a priority target.”

The arcane magic caster collapsed after taking a mortal blow. If someone

could cast a healing spell on him or apply a potion, he might have been able to

get back into the fight, but nobody had the energy for that. In the end, all they

could do was have the thief cover him and prevent the enemy from finishing him

off.

“But why did they think there were only this many Old Guarders?”

That was truly a mystery.

Had they unconsciously imagined the scenario going in their favor? That did

not mean they were stupid. Perhaps humans thought like that when they did not

want to look despair right in the eye; their survival instincts flared to their limits

in order to build up their courage.

“Besides, it was hopeless anyway.”

“Yes, no matter how you look at it.”

“WHat If tHEy WENt oN fULL dEfeNSe tO buY TiME aNd foR tHE otHeR

tHIeVEs tO ComE BAck?”

Everyone glared at Entoma.

“As if they’d come back!”

“…Goes without saying.”

“There’s no way, right? It’s impossible for them to come back safely from the

Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick.”

There was a scream of unbearable pain, followed by the sound of something

collapsing. The battle maids turned to look at the source of the sound, and then

spoke sadly.

“Ah, THe tHIeF weNT dOWn TOo.”

“The outcome of the battle’s been decided.”

“Like I said, maybe we should have listened to them beg for mercy on the

steps…”

“But they were so confident back then! Of course I was wondering if they had

some plan in mind.”

The thick scent of fresh blood wafted over to the maids from the thief’s body.

“SMeLLs TasTY…”

“You can’t do that,” Yuri chided Entoma.

Their master had issued an order to recover everyone who was incapacitated,

whether they were alive or dead. Naturally, they could not present an insect-

chewed body to their master. It would be terribly rude.

“fREsH MEaT…”

“We’ll ask Ainz-sama if you can eat it later. Bear with it for now.”

“But this isn’t good, right? The original plan was to see if we could deal with

fleeing people, right?”

“Seems like it. That’s why they posted pretty strong undead near the walls.”

“CoCYTus-saMA muST HAve pREdiCTEd THat We’D CATch uP tO thEM

EasILY, bUT…”

“…Didn’t expect them to fight head-on.”

“Well, this is what happens when you don’t understand your opponent’s

strength. Alright, we’ll heal the ones who are still breathing and send them to

the torture room. As for the dead… we’ll report them to Ainz-sama.

And so, Palpatra and the Worker team he led vanished that night.

# *2*

# 

# 

# 

“Push them back!”

Gringam’s furious cry rang through the burial vault that was filed with the

stench of mildew and rotting corpses.

The room was 20 meters long on each side, and the ceiling was at least 5

meters overhead. This room, illuminated by the light spell of the magic caster

and torches dropped on the floor, was packed full of people.

Gringam and the members of Heavy Masher had been forced into the corner

of the room. The rest of the burial vault was flooded with massive quantities of

low-end undead such as Zombies and Skeletons.

There were so many that counting them would be an exercise in

pointlessness.

Gringam and the shield-carrying warrior stemmed the flood of death head-

on, forming a defense to keep the undead from reaching the back-liners.

A Zombie pounded on Gringam’s full plate armor with both its hands. While

Zombies were stronger than regular human beings, they were still not enough

to put so much as a scratch on the steel plate armor. The rotted, fragile hands

splattered on contact, leaving putrid chunks of rotting flesh stuck to the full

plate armor.

The same went for the Skeletons. The rusted weapons which they held could

not possibly harm enchanted full plate.

Of course, they might have gotten in a lucky shot. But such lucky shots had

not occurred, thanks to the protective magic on them.

Gringam swung the axe in his hand, but every time he brought one down,

another undead being would rush in to fill the gap. They pressed in ever closer,

as though they wanted to squash Gringam and the others to death.

“Dammit! There’s too many!”

The shield-bearing warrior beside Gringam growled in pain. His shield

covered his entire body, so he had not taken any attacks, but the shield was

covered in filthy fluids.

He smashed the skulls of Zombies and Skeletons with his mace, but he could

not hold out against the enemy’s pressure, and he was slowly forced back.

“Where did all these enemies come from?!”

The warrior’s question was very reasonable.

After Gringam’s group separated from the others at the crossroads, they had

searched several rooms. Sadly, none of the rooms they searched contained

wealth like in the mausoleums, but they had found several valuable treasures.

They continued slowly exploring in this manner. Then, they entered the room

and began searching it, whereupon the door had suddenly opened and a huge

horde of undead flooded into the room from nowhere.

Zombies and Skeletons were hardly strong foes. However, their numbers were

a threat of their own.

Once they were dragged down or pressed down, they would not be able to

move even if they did not die. At that point, the undead horde would assault the

back-liners.

The back-liners would probably not go down easily either, but the sheer

numbers they faced left them uneasy.

If things went on like this, a stroke of bad luck might lead to their battle lines

crumbling. Having reached this conclusion, Gringam decided to use the power

he had wanted to conserve.

“We need to finish this right away! I place my trust in thee!”

The back-liners — who had only been casting stones until now — made their

move.

Normally, undead like this were not a problem for Gringam and the rest of

Heavy Masher. However, that was also the reason why the backliners chose to

wait and conserve their strength. Once the backline made a move, eliminating

undead like these would be as easy as falling off a log.

“My lord, O God of Earth! I beseech thee to purge the unclean!”

The priest clasped his holy symbol, and his cry took the form of power. A cool,

clean feeling surged through the burial vault — which had been filled with

unclean air — in a wave of divine might that was more potent than usual. The

priest used his ability to turn undead.

In the wake of that wave, the undead crumbled into ash and dust, starting

from the ones nearest the priest.

When there was a great difference between the respective power levels of

both sides, the ability to turn undead could instead directly destroy them.

However, destroying many undead at once was extremely difficult, and the user

needed a certain degree of power.

In the end, that single move disintegrated over 20 undead beings.

“I’ll blow you away! [Fireball]!

The arcane magic caster cast his [Fireball], which flew to the back of the

undead horde where it detonated. In a single, ferocious instant of flame, the false

lives of all the Zombies and Skeletons within the spell’s area of effect were

consumed and burned away, leaving nothing but ash and smoke.

“I’m not done yet! [Fireball]!”

“My lord, Oh God of Earth! I beseech thee to purge the unclean!”

The backliners launched another round of area-of-effect attacks and the

number of undead sharply decreased.

“At them!”

“Alright!”

The warrior cast aside his shield, holding his mace in both hands, and together

with Gringam, they charged into the undead horde. It would have been easy for

the magic casters to wipe them out, but Gringam had chosen a charge anyway,

because the truth was that he wanted to conserve their mana. In particular, the

priest’s ability to turn undead had a limited number of uses. His profession made

him particularly adept at dealing with the undead, and it was arguably their

secret weapon in this tomb.

Gringam charged into the undead horde, his axe swinging. Sticky fluids oozed

— perhaps it would have spurted, if its heart were beating — from the flying

body parts. The odor from the open, severed wounds on the corpses was

nauseating but it was not unbearable.

Or rather, one could say that their noses were numbed to it.

Gringam and the warrior worked together, attacking, attacking and attacking

some more. They gave no thought to defense.

They could make such an assault because of magical aid and the sturdy armor

protecting them, in addition to the fact that they were facing such weak undead.

Every now and then, something would strike Gringam’s head, but his armor

absorbed the impact, and he hardly felt anything in his neck. Even when his chest

and belly were struck, he hardly felt the blows.

After all, their foes were the weakest of the undead to begin with. The only

danger just now had been their human wave tactics; once the enemy ranks had

been thinned to this extent, the fighting was much easier. The warrior kept

swinging his weapon, and shouted:

“All the undead we’ve met are piddly little creatures, but there’s a lot of them

in this tomb!”

“So there’s no guarantee that stronger undead won’t show up! Although, if

there are stronger undead, I have no idea why they haven’t appeared yet!”

The person answering him was the priest, who was observing the battle from

the rear as he picked up the warrior’s shield.

“…No, perhaps the undead here were summoned by some means. It might

have been some kind of ritual, or through an item.”

The strange thing was that the corpses vanished after a certain amount of

time had passed, so the ground was not carpeted in bodies, leaving them no place

to stand. That part sounded like what happened to summoned monsters after

they died, hence the wizard’s warning to the others.

“Some gimmick that mass-summons weak undead… I heartily reject it! I fear

to imagine this tomb thoroughly flooded with zombies!”

Gringam replied as he felled skeletons like trees, and then he surveyed the

interior of the room. There were few undead left, less than the number of fingers

on both hands. It did not look like a new batch would be coming in through the

door, and the battle would be over soon.

Just as he thought that, a bone-chilling sensation transfixed him through the

soles of his feet.

His danger sense ordered him to flee immediately, but he could not do so right

now. Even so—

“Look out! Head outside—”

The thief seemed to have sensed it as well as he shouted.

However, it was too late. All of a sudden, the originally sturdy floor suddenly

turned weak. A floating sensation engulfed them. A moment later, their

unbalanced bodies were dumped heavily on the ground.

His comrades cried out in pain. However, Gringam poured his strength into

gripping the axe which he had not released even through his fall. As he smashed

the Skeletons that had fallen with him, he stood up.

“Destroy the enemy!”

The undead had also been damaged from the fall — in particular, the

Skeletons were weak against bludgeoning attacks and had thus taken a great deal

of damage — so fighting them was much easier than before.

After eliminating the undead within the room, Gringam finally had the luxury

of looking around the room.

They were probably at the bottom of a pit below a magical trap that caused

the floor to vanish. Looking up, the ceiling seemed very far away. At a glance, it

looked like it was 12 meters overhead. Three meters above the floor was a closed

door. Three meters above — a total of six meters above the ground — was an

open door, the one through which Gringam and the others had originally entered

the room. One could say they had fallen a distance of roughly two floors.

The overall shape of this room was like a square pyramid. The floor of the

room sloped down toward a point, and due to the steep incline, one might end

up rolling to the bottom of the room — the center — if one were not careful. In

fact, one of his comrades had actually rolled down there and gotten stuck at the

bottom. He had almost been buried alive by the falling Zombies.

It was hard to believe they had barely been hurt by falling into a place like this.

The strange thing was that there were four tunnel-like structures on each wall

at the three-meter mark, on the same level as the closed door, for a total of 16.

“It looks like a room used for drowning. I’ll bet they’ll pour in water from

those tunnel-like things up there. I’ll pass on that, if you don’t mind. It’s worse

if they’re Slimes or the like instead.”

“I agree. Let’s check out that door and get out through there if it’s okay.

Climbing two floors of a wall with no handholds was quite difficult. At most,

only the thief could do it; people like Gringam in their full plate armor would

have a very hard time. In contrast, that unknown door might not be safe, but

reaching it seemed much easier.

Just as they were discussing how to climb up, heads emerged almost

simultaneously from the sixteen tunnels. They were corpses swollen so badly

they looked like they were about to explode — Plague Bombers.

Their bodies were bloated from the negative energy accumulated within

them, and they exploded when killed. Their death explosions harmed the living

and healed the undead at the same time, making them very troublesome undead.

The meat lump-like undead leapt through the air. The Plague Bombers’ bodies

hit the floor and made a nauseating sound. The problem was what happened

after that. Their round bodies did not stay still on the slopes but rolled down

like boulders, towards Gringam and the others.

“Look out! Get clear!”

“I’m the intellectual of the group, don’t tell me what to do!”

Everyone — the wizard who was almost in tears included — barely managed

to avoid the attack, and so the undead rolled into the center of the inverted

pyramid. The next wave of Plague Bombers had already showed their ugly faces,

which let Gringam and the others know that just now was just the first wave. At

the same time, they also guessed what would happen after this.

“Run! This room is going to be flooded with them!”

If they were knocked into the center of the room by the intense impacts from

the rolling undead, they would assuredly be squashed to death. Even if they were

not crushed, they would be immobilized, and then they would die from the

repeated negative energy explosions of the other undead being flattened by their

fellows.

“What a despicable trap! Someone, please give me a boost!”

“As if I could! You fall in there and you’re done for!”

Even if someone managed to evade one attack, the moment they lost their

balance, they would not be able to avoid the next attack. Nobody dared boost

anyone else under those circumstances.

“Then I’ll use magic!”

“Don’t use [Fly]! You’re not strong enough to pull us all!”

“No, uwah! That was close! I’m going to use [Web Ladder]!”

“That’ll do! Please anchor it to the nearest door! Gringam, cover him!”

“—No! Halt! We must flee through the second story door through which we

entered! The door below is perilous!”

His companion did not question the basis for those words, but they trusted

Gringam.

“[Web Ladder]!”

The magic took effect, and a spiderweb climbed up the wall, until it reached

the second floor.

This magically created spiderweb had a unique stickiness to it. When one did

not want to let go it would be adhesive, but when one wanted to move, it would

not be, making it very suitable as a ladder.

Gringam and the others were worried, but in the end they managed to climb

up the ladder in single file.

Gringam finally reached the door that had been open all this while, and

carefully studied the passage through it. If they were hit and knocked down now,

they would surely meet with a hideous fate.

He sighed in relief. It would seem what he feared — undead above the tunnels

— had not taken place.

After he was sure of it, he jumped on top of the tunnels and then pulled

everyone up.

“We’re saved! Being crushed to death by undead is one of the most horrible

ways to die!”

“…These ruins are really maliciously designed. I sprained my ankle when we

fell, hope you can heal me.”

I think the negative energy explosion grazed my toes! That was scary as hell!”

“I barely managed to avoid it by luck. It’s too much to ask a wizard to dodge

attacks.”

His companions panted, swapping complaints and curses between breaths.

“Say, Gringam, why did you want us to avoid that door? I thought that door

would have been the right choice. Don’t they always put the right route in the

most dangerous place?”

“It was just a hunch I had… take a weapon you don’t need and attack that

door.”

Gringam had reverted to his usual way of speaking now that he was exhausted.

After hearing his reply, the thief immediately pulled out a dagger and threw it at

the door. The dagger flew in a straight line, and struck home — or at least, when

it was about to, part of the door bulged out and shaped itself into a tentacle,

which deflected the flying dagger.

“That’s a… Door Imitator! No, given the color of that tentacle, it’s probably

an undead Door Imitator. This sort of enemy captures its enemy with sticky

body fluids and then delivers a one-sided beatdown with its tentacles.”

“Cheh! A double trap, huh, that’s pretty evil. Still, you’re amazing, you actually

saw through it.”

“It was just a hunch. No, strictly speaking, I just went with what I knew over

the unknown. Also, consider the position of that door; it would be taking

repeated negative energy explosions. While negative energy explosions probably

wouldn’t do too much damage to an inanimate door, I had the feeling they’d put

something funny there. Then, let’s move—”

At this point, Gringam shut up. That was because the thief who had been going

on and on since just now had a finger on his lips, and was tilting his head to

listen.

Gringam pricked up his ears as well. He could hear a rhythmic tapping *tak tak*

*tak* sound on the floor.

Everyone looked to the source of the sound — towards the passage.

“That… ought to be an enemy, right? Can’t they give us a break?”

“Yeah, there’s only one of them, and they’re not trying to be stealthy, so that

should be it. I hope it’s the last one…”

Everybody raised their weapons, and the warrior at the front raised the shield

his colleague had given him, hiding half his body behind it. The wizard pointed

the glowing tip of his staff at the passage ahead, where the sound was coming

from, ready to cast a spell at any time. The priest raised his holy symbol and the

thief aimed his bow in the direction of the noise.

The *tak tak tak* sound grew louder, and the other party finally showed

themselves.

It wore a luxurious — though fairly aged — robe, which covered a body that

was slimmer than that of a woman’s or a child’s. It held a gnarled staff in one

hand — that had probably been the source of the rapping sound.

Its skeletal face was covered by a thin layer of rotting skin, and there was a

malevolent intelligence in its eyes. Negative energy wreathed its body like mist.

This was an undead magic caster. Its name was—

“—An Elder Lich!”

The wizard, who had been the first to surmise its identity, cried out.

Indeed. After a wicked magic caster died and the body was infused with

negative energy, it would give rise to an evil monster like this.

The moment Gringam and the others heard that it was an Elder Lich, they

immediately changed formation. Nobody stood in a straight line with anyone

else, and each of them kept a distance from each other, to defend against area-

of-effect spells.

Elder Liches were fairly powerful opponents. To adventurers, platinum-

rankers would not be able to defeat one easily, but mythril-ranked teams would

be certain of doing so. If Gringam and the others disregarded fatigue, they would

be able to beat it. In addition, they were fortunate enough to have a team

member who was exceptionally potent against the undead, which was a shot in

the arm for everyone.

Also, Elder Liches were hard to deal with at a distance, but given the current

distance, the battle conditions were very favorable for them.

“Is that the master of the tomb?!”

That was Gringam’s conclusion. Elder Liches were controllers. Sometimes

they would control hordes of undead, and depending on the circumstances, they

could even make deals with the living.

Good examples of those were the captain of the ghost ship that sailed through

the mist of the Katze Plains, or the Elder Lich who became famous for ruling a

city, and so on.

Therefore, it was not at all unusual for an Elder Lich to be the master of this

tomb.

“Did we hit the jackpot? That’s a stroke of luck!”

“The job didn’t ask us to kill the master of the tomb!”

“We’ll show him the power of Heavy Masher!”

“Behold, the divine protection of the gods!”

His other colleagues were shouting. They were doing so in order to banish the

fear they felt when facing a mighty foe like an Elder Lich.

“Defensive spells—”

Just as Gringam was about to start calling battle orders to his comrades, a

strange feeling arose within him. He immediately found the reason for that

feeling. It was the powerful enemy before them, the Elder Lich.

“…What’s wrong?”

“He doesn’t seem to want to… attack us?”

The Elder Lich was clearly looking at Gringam, yet it had not made a move. It

had not raised its staff, and neither had it begun incanting spells. It simply

watched them in silence.

Gringam and the others were hard-pressed to hide their confusion. This was

because they thought they would be charging into combat, yet they did not dare

make the first move.

It was true that the undead bore hostility towards the living. However, it was

also true that certain intelligent undead were willing to deal with humanity.

While they would probably start from a weaker position if they opened

negotiations first, sometimes the undead would ask for a ceasefire, and one

could gain magic items made with long-lost techniques.

The most important thing was that avoiding combat was the ideal course of

action when one faced a powerful enemy like an Elder Lich. Perhaps it had

shown up because it was tired of not being able to eliminate the group with its

traps, but it might also be because it knew their strength and wanted to

peacefully negotiate.

After considering these possibilities, striking first would be far too rash. That

would essentially be abandoning all possibility of negotiation. This was the heart

of the enemy’s power. It would be too risky to plunge into battle without

ensuring that there was a way for them to retreat.

Gringam and the rest of his group looked at each others’ faces, and verified

that everyone was thinking the same thing.

It was his job as their leader to speak for the rest of them.

“Forgive my disrespect, but thou seem’st to be the master of this tomb. We— ”

The Elder Lich turned its horrific face to Gringam, and then rested a slender

finger on its lips.

In other words — *quiet.*

While such a gesture was very unfitting for an Elder Lich, they were not brave

— no, they were not suicidal enough to tell this powerful entity such a thing.

Gringam obediently shut up. Then, he heard a sound again from the silent

passage, and he immediately doubted his ears.

He had heard this sound before, that of something going *tak tak tak* as it

rapped against the ground. And there were a lot of them—

Gringam and his group exchanged glances again. They did not want to believe

the answer the sound was telling them.

And then — everyone screamed at once.

“Who was it?! Who said the Elder Lich was the master of this tomb?!”

“I’m sorry! It was me!”

“Are you fucking kidding me?! This is ridiculous!”

“Oi oi oi oi oi, we can’t possibly win this!”

“Even divine protection has its limits!”

More Elder Liches appeared behind the original one; six of them, in fact.

There were now seven of these powerful magic casters.

Granted, since they were the same sort of entity, they would attack in the

same way. In other words, once they had a way to negate all the attacks the

enemy could muster, beating seven of them would not be a problem.

The problem now was that they did not have such a way, and they could not

possibly do so.

In the face of such utterly hopeless odds, Gringam’s group lost their will to

fight.

“Now then, let us begin.”

As the Elder Lich spoke in its voice that did not sound like it wanted to

negotiate at all, seven staves rose into the air. At the same time, Gringam

bellowed:

“Retreat!”

Everyone in the team ran with all their might, as though they were waiting for

that word. They ran in the opposite direction from the Elder Liches. Of course,

they hardly had the luxury of contemplating what lay ahead of them; all they

could think of was fleeing the excessive firepower of the Elder Lich cabal and

buy themselves some chance of survival.

At their head was the thief. After that was Gringam, the wizard, the priest and

the warrior.

They ran nonstop, without hesitating.

They reached a corner. These were places where they ought to have been on

guard against traps or monsters, but as the footsteps pressed in from behind,

they did not have the free time to check carefully. Everything was up to the

heavens; all they could do was run.

There were two stone-carved doors on either side of the passage, but after

considering that they might be dead ends, nobody was brave enough to rush in.

The armored people made a cacophonous sound of metal clashing as they ran,

which echoed along the passage. While the sound might attract monsters,

nobody had the time or energy to cast [Silence].

They ran, and ran, and ran some more.

They moved their legs, heedless to everything else. Turning corners and

sprinting madly made them lose their sense of direction, and they no longer had

any idea of where they were right now. If possible, they would have liked to

return to the entrance, but nobody had the energy to consider that.

“—Are they still behind us?!” Gringam shouted as he ran. The warrior at the

end of the group replied:

“They’re still there! They’re running after us!

“Dammit!”

“Why the hell are they running! Why aren’t they flying?!”

“If they flew, we’d be eating spells one after the other, moron!”

“Let’s hide in a small room and parley…” the mage panted. He was the

physically weakest member of the group, and he looked like he would collapse

at any time.

Gringam decided that this was not going to work. The mage’s stamina was

going to give out.

Undead monsters like Elder Liches would not get tired. If this kept up, they

would be forced into a corner, and once their endurance was gone, all that

awaited them was to be slowly picked off.

“How can there be so many Elder Liches…”

Such a thing was impossible if one went by common sense.

“Don’t tell me the master of this tomb is more powerful than an Elder Lich!”

That was the only answer they could think of. However, was there really such

a powerful undead being? Gringam was at a loss for an answer.

“Dammit! This goddamn tomb!”

The warrior running at the end of the pack cursed between panting breaths.

A glowing magic circle floated off the ground at that very moment. The magic

circle was very large, big enough to encompass Gringam and his team within its

bounds.

“What—”

There was no telling who it belonged to, but he heard something that sounded

like a scream—

# 

●

# 

—There was a floating sensation, different from when they had fallen down

just now.

Gringam’s vision was filled with blackness. The sounds of crunching and

squishing came from under his feet, and he felt his body slowly sinking. It was

just like falling into a swamp. He panicked for a moment, but this swamp-like

place was not very deep, and he stopped sinking after it reached his waist.

In this silent world of darkness, Gringam called out uneasily, like a child who

had lost his parents:

“…Is anyone there?”

“—I’m here, Gringam.”

He immediately received a response from a comrade — the thief. In addition,

he was not far away. It was probably around the same distance that had

separated them while they had been running.

“…Are the others here?”

There was no answer. He had guessed it; there was no light here, so the wizard

and the warrior were not present. He had been lucky enough that the thief was

here at all.

“It seems we’re the only two around.”

“Indeed, it is as… cheh! Yeah, you’re right.”

He stood in place, studying the mood in the air around him. The blackness

extended infinitely around him, filling him with the fear of not knowing where

the darkness ended and where he began.

Nothing seemed to be moving—

“Need a light?”

“Might as well.”

Would doing so break the silence? Would it trigger a trap? Despite the

countless doubts filling his heart, it was a regrettable fact that human eyes could

not see through darkness. Light was indispensable.

“Right then, hang on a bit.”

The thief’s voice seemed to be moving around in the darkness. And then, there

was a source of light.

The first thing he saw was the thief, holding a glow stick high in his hand.

Then, he saw the light reflected of countless smaller surfaces. It made him think

of the glittering treasure he had seen in the mausoleum.

However — it was not.

Gringam fought the desire to scream, while the thief’s face seized up as well.

They saw countless reflections. The reflections were of the insects which

filled every inch of the room; what humans called cockroaches. The smallest

were only the size of his little finger’s tip while the biggest were over a meter

long. The room was filled with cockroaches of all shapes and sizes, and they

crawled on top of each other.

So the crunching sensation under his feet was caused by squashing

cockroaches. The thought of being submerged up to his waist in cockroaches was

that much more abhorrent.

The room was very wide, so the light of the glow stick did not reach the walls.

Given the glow stick’s effective radius of illumination was around 15 meters, one

could estimate the size of the room from there. He looked to the ceiling and saw

countless cockroaches reflected in the glow.

“This… what is this place?”

The thief spoke like he was out of breath, and Gringam could understand how

he felt. He must have had the feeling that if he made a sound, all these

cockroaches would start moving.

“What on earth happened?”

“…This is a pit, right?”

As the thief looked around in fear, Gringam thought of the last thing he had

seen before his world was swallowed by darkness — the magic circle that had

floated up under his feet — and then he told the thief:

“It can’t be. I don’t think this is an ordinary pit, we must have been hit by

some kind of spell…”

“To think there’d be a teleporting trap… or was it a spell from the Elder Lich?”

Teleportation spells existed; for instance, the third-tier spell [Dimensional

Move]. However, that spell only worked on the caster themselves. The ability to

teleport others, and multiple people at once, was a spell of the—

“—I think it was a fifth- or sixth-tier spell that could teleport multiple people

at once, right?”

“Right… I remember it should have been something like that.”

Could it be that our opposition is really so…”

They knew very few people who could use magic of the fifth tier. However,

Gringam could accept that hypothesis. If a mighty being like that existed, then

the peaceful coexistence of multiple Elder Liches was easy to explain. That was

because it would surely be child’s play for such a powerful entity to rule over or

command Elder Liches.

A chill settled over Gringam’s heart as he keenly realized the danger of the

tomb. At the same time, he felt an intense resentment towards the Count who

had offered him this job. Of course, it had been Gringam and the others who had

accepted the job, and they had known there would be risks, and they had still

laid their lives out as chips on the card table. Perhaps it could not be helped that

he was looking for a scapegoat.

However, the Count should have known something about this place.

Otherwise he would not have offered such a high payout and gathered so many

Workers and offered the job to investigate this tomb.

“So he couldn’t bear to share that information? Son of a bitch… let’s get out

of here! These ruins… are not a place we should have touched.”

“Ah, got it. Then, Gringam, I’ll go first, and you can follow me.”

It would seem the thief still had not realized it yet. Fortunately, he had not.

That was the fact that these cockroaches were not moving.

Gringam sized up the mass of cockroaches in front of him.

Their feelers were twitching faintly, so they were probably not dead yet, but

they remained still. A mysterious air of dread filled the area.

“—No, you two gentlemen will not be going anywhere.”

A third person’s voice suddenly rang forth.

“Who is it?!”

Gringam and the thief frantically looked around, but they could not sense

anyone moving.

“Oh, do pardon me. By order of Ainz-sama, I have been granted dominion over

this place. My name is Kyouhukou. It is a pleasure to meet you two gentlemen.”

Their eyes went to the source of the sound, where they saw a bizarre sight.

Something was forcing its way through the pile of cockroaches as though it were

going to emerge from below.

Their melee weapons could not reach that far. The thief silently drew his bow,

while Gringam planned to pull out his catapult — but that was only for show. If

the battle began, he could wade through this waist-deep sea of cockroaches and

hack at his foe with his axe.

Soon, they saw that the entity that had worked its way through the

cockroaches was, in fact, another cockroach.

However, this cockroach seemed different from its fellow cockroaches around

it. It was only 30 centimeters tall, yet it stood erect on two legs.

It was draped in a grand-looking red cape edged with gold thread, and it wore

a tiny gold-gleaming crown on its head. Its forelegs held a pure white scepter set

with a gemstone.

The strangest thing was that it was looking right at Gringam and the thief

despite standing upright. An insect would naturally look up if it were standing

on two legs, but the being before their eyes was different.

Other than that, it was not too different from the other cockroaches. No,

those alone were big differences.

Gringam exchanged looks with the thief, and they agreed that Gringam would

parley with their opposition. After verifying that the thief had put down his bow

and the arrow nocked to it, Gringam asked Kyouhukou:

“Who… are you?”

“Umu. It would seem you did not hear my introduction just now. Shall I state

my name once more?”

“No, that’s not what I meant…” Halfway through, Gringam realized that was

not what he ought to be doing or asking. “…Alright, I’ll get to the point; would

you like to make a deal with us?”

“Oh, a deal. I am very thankful to the two of you, and I am delighted to deal

with you.”

There was something strange about those words — why was it so grateful to

the two of them? It bothered Gringam, but given the overwhelmingly

unfavorable circumstances before him, he could not ask the other party such a

question.

“…We would like… we would like to ask you to allow us to safely leave this

room.”

“I see, it is only natural that you should think that way. However, even if you

two gentlemen do manage to leave this room, your current location is within the

second floor of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick. It behooves me to

mention that returning to the surface will be very difficult.”

*The second floor—*

Those words made Gringam’s eyes go wide.

“We passed through the mausoleum on the surface, descended a flight of

stairs and passed through a doorway — was that the first floor?”

“Many would regard it as such, would they not?”

“No, I was simply confirming that.”

“Haha, well, you two gentlemen were teleported here from the first floor.

Your confusion is eminently justified.”

Somehow, Kyouhukou was nodding. Gringam felt like he had been stabbed by

icicles when he saw it.

This was a terror born of his suspicions being proven right.

In other words, while he did not know how they had done it, their opposition

used teleportation magic as a trap. What kind of spell was it, and what kind of

magical technology had they used? He knew how shocking this was despite not

being a magic caster.

“…Indeed, I’m hoping you can tell us how to leave this tomb, but I dare not

ask so much. Just allowing us to leave this room will be enough.”

“Hmhm.”

“We… are willing to give you anything you desire.”

“I see…”

Kyouhukou nodded deeply, and looked as though it were deep in thought.

For a short while, the interior of the room was deathly silent. In the end,

Kyouhukou seemed to have made up its mind. It nodded and said:

“What I desire is already within my grasp. The terms you gentlemen propose

do not satisfy me.”

Gringam was about to open his mouth, but Kyouhukou raised a foreleg to stop

him, and then said:

“Before that, it seems you do not understand the reason for my gratitude

towards the two of you. Then, permit me to explain. In truth, my familiars have

long grown tired of eating each other. Thus, I am grateful that the two of you are

going to become their feed.

“Ah!”

The thief loosed an arrow immediately upon hearing that.

The arrow whistled through the air, but Kyouhukou’s crimson cape caught it,

and it fell powerlessly.

Then — the room began to writhe.

Countless rustling noises echoed through the room, and it became a torrent

of sound.

Then, a tsunami loomed over them.

It was a churning flow of darkness.

“Regretfully, there are only the two of you, but even so, I hope you will fill my

familiars’ bellies.”

The swell of the tidal wave swallowed Gringam and the thief. It looked just

like being devoured by the ocean.

As Gringam sank into the black whirlpool, he frantically swatted at the

cockroaches which had worked their way into the gaps of his armor.

Weapons were useless against a swarm of such tiny insects, and Gringam did

not know any martial arts which could attack an area. In that case, smacking

them with his hands would be faster. Therefore, he had already cast aside his

weapon, and he did not know where it had gone.

He struggled and tried to flail his arms, but the countless cockroaches

weighing him down had already taken his freedom of movement. His actions

were just like a drowning man thrashing his arms about. All Gringam could hear

was the rustling of countless cockroaches.

His thief companion’s voice was drowned out by the rustling, and he could

not hear it.

No, it only made sense that he could not hear the thief’s voice. That was

because the thief’s mouth, throat and stomach were stuffed full of cockroaches,

and he could not vocalize.

Prickling pain filled Gringam’s body from head to toe. It was the pain from

the cockroaches which had infiltrated through the gaps in his armor and were

chewing at his flesh.

“Stop—”

Gringam wanted to cry out, but the cockroaches working their way into his

mouth blocked it up. He frantically tried to spit out the cockroaches, but every

time he opened his mouth, another cockroach would squirm in through his lips,

and then crawl around in his mouth.

Tiny cockroaches seemed to have burrowed into his ears. The rustling grew

louder, and his ears were unbearably itchy.

Countless cockroaches crawled up and down his face, biting everywhere. Pain

covered his eyelids. However, he could not open his eyes. He could imagine what

would happen to his eyes if he did so.

Gringam understood what sort of fate awaited him. He would be eaten alive

by cockroaches.

“I don’t want this!”

He screamed out loud, and the cockroaches promptly flowed into his mouth.

They wriggled everywhere, and then burrowed into the depths of his throat.

Then, he felt something slide down his throat into his stomach. The sensation

of a live cockroach thrashing around in his guts made him want to throw up.

Gringam struggled desperately once more.

He could not bear to die like this.

He wanted his two elder brothers to look at him with different eyes. This was

the sole, driving purpose which had motivated him and let him reach his present

position.

Gringam had saved up enough that he could spend his days in leisure even

without adventuring, and with his reputation, he could easily marry a beautiful

woman, the likes of which one could not find in a village. Be it in terms of

strength or wealth, he was far superior to his elder brothers who had chased him

from the house. He should have been a winner in life.

He did not want to die in a place like this.

“Abbbooooaahhhhhh! I want to go back aliveeeeee!” he screamed as he spat

out chewed-up cockroaches.

“…My, but you can endure. Then, another helping for you.”

Gringam’s cries vanished into the black vortex several seconds later.



# 

●

# 

His eyes suddenly opened.

A ceiling came into view. Said ceiling was made of fitted stone slabs, and there

was an object which emitted white light set into it. He did not know how he had

come to be here, but when he thought to look around, he realized that his head

could not move. No, it was not just his head. His arms, his legs, his waist and his

chest were bound by something and immobilized.

These incomprehensible circumstances sparked terror within him. He wanted

to scream, but something was stuck in his mouth. He could not speak, and he

could not close his mouth.

All he could do was move his eyes. He frantically tried to see what was going

on around him, and just then a voice addressed him.

“Aran~ so you’re awake.”

That voice was garbled. It was difficult to determine if it belonged to a female

or a male.

A horrific monster worked its way into his immobilized field of vision,

appearing before him.

That thing had a human’s body, but its head was a bizarre object that looked

like a deformed octopus. It trailed six long, twitching tentacles that descended

to its thighs.

Its skin was the cloudy white color of a drowned corpse. Its body was swollen

like the aforementioned drowned corpse, with a few bands of black leather to

substitute for clothing. Those bands bit into its skin, looking just like butcher’s

twine used to wrap up cuts of meat, and it was hideous beyond belief. Perhaps

they would have been bewitchingly alluring on a beautiful woman, but on a

spine-chilling monster like this, it was less seductive than stomach-churning.

The monster’s hands sprouted four slender fingers each, with webs between

them. They had long nails, each with beautiful nail polish applied, and they were

further adorned with strange nail art.

This bizarre being looked at him with cloudy, pupil-less eyes.

“Ufufufu. Did you sleep well?”

“Hahhh… hahhh…”

His breathing was heavy under the twin assaults of fear and shock. The

monster caressed his cheek with a gentle gesture, like a mother comforting a

child.

The strangely cold sensation sent a chill through his entire body.

It would have been perfect if it emitted a heavy scent of blood or rot. However,

it instead radiated a floral fragrance. That only served to heighten his sense of

terror.

“Ara~ there’s no need to shrink in fear.”

The creature’s line of sight moved to his groin, and the sensation of the air

against his skin let him finally realize that he was naked.

“Mmm, should I ask you for your name?”

The monster placed its hand on what seemed to be its cheek and tilted its

head. Surely it would have been a delightful gesture if a woman had done it, but

instead it was an octopus-headed creature that looked like a drowned corpse. All

he felt was disgust and fear.

“……”

He could only move his eyeballs, and the monster laughed at him. Its mouth

was covered by its tentacles, and its expression did not seem to have changed.

However, he could still tell that it was laughing, because its cold, glassy, marble-

like eyes were narrowed.

“Ufufufu, you don’t want to tell me? You’re so shy, how adorable.”

The monster’s hand slid over his chest, like it was tracing out letters, but all

he felt was panic, like his heart might be ripped out at any time.

“Let me tell — you — my — name ♥” the creature said, in a saccharine —

though garbled — voice that sounded like it was appending hearts to the end of

every sentence it said. “I’m Neuronist, the special intelligence gathering officer

of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick. However, everyone also calls me

the torturer.”

The long tentacles moved, exposing the round mouth at their base. The

mouth was edged with a rung of sharp teeth, and a glistening, slender tube that

looked like a tongue snaked out of it, like a straw.

“Afterwards, I’ll use this to suck you dry~”

Suck what dry? He was so afraid that he tried to contort his body, but he was

firmly bound.

“Alright, it’s like this. We caught you.”

Indeed, his last memories were of the thief and Gringam running ahead of him

and vanishing. After that, he did not recall anything until now.

“You do know where you are, don’t you?” Neuronist chuckled, and then

continued. “This is the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick, you know. The

Kingdom of the only member of the 41 Supreme Beings who stayed behind,

Momo— no, Ainz-sama. It is the most honored place in the world.”

“Ainhu-haha?”

“Indeed, Ainz-sama.”

Neutonist understood his poorly pronounced words as its hand wandered

over his skin.

“He’s one of the 41 Supreme Beings, and the leader who once coordinated the

other Supreme Beings. And he’s also a very, very charming man. Anyone who

sees him would want to pledge their utmost loyalty to him. As for me, if I were

fortunate enough to be called to Ainz-sama’s bed, I would gladly offer him my

first time.”

The way this monster shyly twisted its body could not be considered adorable,

but abhorrent.

“Mmmm, I’ll tell you something,” The monster began tracing letters on his

chest, like a young girl in the throes of her first crush. “The last time Ainz-sama

visited me, he was staring at my body. His gaze was like a male beast selecting

its prey. After that, he seemed embarrassed, and then turned his eyes away. It

made my heart race and my spine shiver~”

At this point, the creature stopped moving and brought its face over, staring

into his eyes. He desperately tried to distance himself from that frightening

visage, but his body could not move.

“That little brat Shalltear and that ugly freak Albedo both seem to be enjoying

Ainz-sama’s attentions, but no matter how you think of it, I’m more attractive

than them. Don’t you think?”

“Ahh, hahh hink hoo thoo.”

What manner of fate would befall him if he dared disagree with her? The fear

of that made him agree with her.

Neuronist narrowed her eyes in delight, and it clapped its hands together and

looked into the air. It looked just like a zealot praying to the heavens.

“Fufufu, you’re sweet. Or are you just telling the truth? Still, for some reason,

Ainz-sama has never called for me… ahhh, Ainz-sama… your stoic attitude is so

attractive…”

The monster was so moved that it shuddered, and it made him think of a

segmented worm crawling around.

“…Ah, I’ve gone all shivery. Ara, pardon me, I’ve been talking all this while.”

*Please forget all about me.* Neuronist ignored his mental prayer and continued:

“Let me tell you what your fate will be. You know what a chorus is, don’t you?”

He rolled his eyes at the sudden question. After seeing his confused reaction,

Neuronist seemed to think he did not know, and so it began to explain.

“They are a choir that sings hymns and psalms, praising the love and glory of

God. I want to have you join the chorus, along with your friends.”

If that was all, then it would be nothing much. While he was not very confident

in his singing voice, he was not completely tone deaf. However, was this

monster’s aim truly so simple? He could not hide the unease within him, and he

glanced at Neuronist out of the corner of his eyes.

“Oh yes~ It’s a chorus~ Even a fool like you who has not sworn his all to Ainz-

sama can make an offering to Ainz-sama if you but raise your voice and sing. We

will have your singing in unison be our objective. Ahhh, my body’s gone shivery

again. This shall be the gospel music that Neuronist will offer to Ainz-sama.”

A smoky color filled those disgusting eyeballs. Perhaps the monster was

feeling excited about its idea. Its narrow, slender fingers writhed like worms.

“Fufufufu. Alright. I’ll introduce you to the people who will help you sing in

harmony.”

They had probably been waiting in a corner of the room, but several people

suddenly appeared in his field of vision.

Once he saw those people, he momentarily forgot to breathe, because he knew

that they were evil creatures at a glance.

They wore tight black leather aprons. Their bodies were not so much white as

cream-colored. Below that skin were — if blood could be purple — purplish

blood vessels.

Their heads were covered in seamless black leather masks. There was no

telling how they could see or even breathe. Their arms were also very long. Each

of them was about two meters tall, but their arms extended down below their

knees.

The belts at their waists contained countless work tools.

There were four of these vile creatures.

“—They are Torturers. These kids will help you sing with a sweet voice.”

He had a very bad feeling about this. He suddenly realized what “singing”

meant, and he frantically twisted his body in an attempt to escape, but his body

still could not move.

“It’s useless~ Your strength won’t be able to break them. These boys will use

healing magic on you, so you can practice to your heart’s content. I’m very

gentle, aren’t I?” Neuronist said in a voice nuanced with wickedness.

“Rho rhu thiiih!”

“Hmm, what’s wrong? Do you want me to stop?”

Neuronist asked him that question as he shouted and the tears welled up in

his eyes. Then, it lightly waggled its six tentacles.

“Listen now, alright~ We, the creations of the Supreme Beings, have value in

existing because that great person chose to stay behind. Serving that great

person is our reason for existence. How could we possibly pity miserable little

thieves like you, who tracked dirt into the home of the noble Supreme One with

your filthy little feet? Did you really think I would take pity on you?”

“Ah hourrrihh!”

“Yes. You’re right. Regret is very important.”

Neuronist produced a slender rod from somewhere. At its tip was a five-

millimeter-long section covered in spikes.

“We’ll start with this.”

He had no idea what it was for, but Neuronist was only too happy to explain.

“I hear that my creator was afflicted by a disease called ‘kidney stones.’ In

order to show my respect for him, we shall begin with this. As it happens, you’re

so small now, so I imagine it’ll go in very easily.”

“Rho rhu thiiih!”

He wailed as he realized what was going to happen to him, and Neuronist

brought its face up to his.

“We’re going to be together for a *very* long time. If you’re going to cry and

make a fuss over this much, it won’t end well for you, you know?”

# *3*

# 

# 

# 

Each team had taken a different route at the crossroads, and among them

Eruya Uzruth had simply charged straight ahead, on the baseless assumption

that there would be a strong enemy waiting for him in the tomb’s depths.

He encountered stone doors and countless turns along the way, and he picked

each one at random, walking silently through the tomb. His route was peaceful,

which bored him. They had not even encountered any traps, much less monsters.

*Perhaps I picked the wrong route.* As Eruya thought that, he clicked his tongue.

“Hurry up already, slowpoke,” Eruya barked at the Elf walking ten meters

ahead of him as she was about to stop. The Elf slave quivered for just a second

before walking tiredly on. She had been walking continuously ever since they

had entered the tomb, and she had not been permitted to slacken her pace.

Fortunately, nothing had happened so far, but if there had been traps, she

could very well have died.

The way he was using his slaves was not so much trap finding as having her

serve as a canary in a mine. Eruya’s team was composed of himself and three Elf

slaves with skills different from his — a ranger, a priest and a druid. Giving such

an order to someone like her, who possessed irreplaceable searching skills, was

too much of a waste.

However, he had his reasons.

Simply put, he was tired of the Elf in front of him.

Surely anyone would be shocked when they heard that answer. Their shock

would not be a matter of ethics, but economics.

Slaves from the Slaine Theocracy were not cheap. This was particularly true

of Elves, whose looks and skills caused their price to soar. In most cases Elves

were shockingly expensive merchandise, and not something an average citizen

could afford.

Among them, those Elves with special skills cost as much as a magic weapon

enchanted with special effects. Even someone like Eruya could not simply buy

one because he wanted to.

However, Tenbu’s income was monopolized by Eruya, and so as long as a job

was successful, he could make the money back quickly. Therefore, once he got

tired of a slave, he did not particularly mind if she died.

*I’ll buy one with bigger breasts next time,* Eruya thought as he looked at the back

of the tired-seeming elf.

*Squeezing their breasts and making them scream ought to be fun.*

Since this job was a cooperative effort with other teams, he had not bedded

the Elves for several days. Granted, nobody would say anything even if he had

slept with them, but jealousy brought about displeasure. That was not

advantageous, and as a Worker, Eruya knew at least that much.

Therefore, his pent-up lust had led Eruya to these thoughts.

“Or maybe, next time I’ll ask for someone like that bitch’s type.”

One of Foresight’s members appeared in Eruya’s mind, the Half-Elf who had

been glaring at Eruya.

That bitch was truly an eyesore.

She also had a girlish-looking female next to her, but Eruya felt that the girl’s

distaste for him was understandable. Women often did not understand the

libido of men, and girls of that age ought to have some desire for purity.

However, lifeforms that were inferior to human beings did not deserve to look

at mankind with an expression like that.

Just thinking about it filled Eruya’s handsome features with rage.

“I want to bash that slut’s face in, beat her until she can’t resist any more…”

The Elf slaves were thoroughly broken before they were handed to their

masters, ensuring that they could not put up any resistance.

But if he made a move on that Half-Elf, she would surely struggle like a

frenzied beast. It was not difficult for Eruya to break and conquer her. However,

he would be hurt as well, and Eruya was not confident in his ability to subdue

live prey. As he lost himself in imagining how it would be like to punch Imina in

the face several times, he was a second late in noticing that the Elf in front of

him had stopped moving.

“Why did you stop? Keep going.”

“Aiieee… ah, I, I heard a sound.”

“A sound?”

Eruya furrowed his brows as the Elf plucked up the courage to reply. He

concentrated on listening. The surroundings were silent, so quiet, in fact, that it

made his ears hurt.

“…I don’t hear anything.”

Normally, he would have simply punched her right in the face, but Elves had

keener hearing than human beings. It might be that she had heard something

which Eruya had not. In order to verify that, he asked the two people beside him:

“How about you lot?”

“Y-yes, I can hear something.”

“It… it sounds like metal clashing against metal.”

“…Is that so.”

There was no way the sound of metal colliding with metal could occur

naturally.

In that case, it must surely have been made by someone. In other words, this

might be the first fight since entering the tomb. As he thought of that, Eruya’s

heart filled with excitement.

“We’re going to check out the source of that sound.”

“Y… yes.”

He let the Elf slave walk ahead of him, and they traveled in the direction of

the noise.

Soon, Eruya heard the sound of metal as well. It was the sound of an intense

collision between one object and another, accompanied by boisterous roars and

shouts.

“Is that the sound of another team fighting? I didn’t think we crossed their

path when we went forward, but it seems we’ve run into another team.”

What had been something like joy dampened in an instant, and Eruya sighed

dejectedly.

“Oh well, forget it. We might be able to back them up and kill some monsters.”

Eruya continued toward the source of the sounds, but he began to feel strange.

This did not sound like a battle. It was just like—

When he turned the corner, his doubts were answered.

After turning the corner, he saw a wide, spacious room before his eyes. It was

big enough that several dozen people could run around inside it. There were ten

Lizardmen in exquisitely crafted armor within the room. All of them wore collars

which had broken chains attached to them, and the ends waggled in the air.

They were swinging their swords within the room. Each mighty hack was

deflected by an unhesitating parry. Scenes like that repeated themselves

throughout the room. It might have looked like an intense battle, but Eruya

immediately saw that they were training.

When Eruya and the others entered the room, the Lizardmen stopped

swinging their swords, which indicated that his guess had been correct.

Apart from the Lizardmen, there was a gigantic fellow with a huge tower

shield and wearing black plate armor with blood vessel-like tracery on it, and

one more person — or rather, one more creature.

It was a massive magical beast, with a coat of silver-white fur and a pair of

intelligent-looking eyes.

“So, thou hast come at last, intruder-dono.”

Talking magical beasts were often difficult opponents. Magical beasts were

usually the sort who attacked by leveraging their powerful bodies, but some

intelligent magical beasts could use magic as well.

Eruya was a genius swordsman, but his magical abilities were hardly

exceptional. He channeled his strength into his core, steeled his soul, and

prepared himself to resist hostile magic as he asked:

“And you are?”

There was no need to bother. Since it was here waiting for him, that implied

that it was the guardian of these ruins. The question now was how powerful this

guardian was.

By it looks, it might even be the overseer of these ruins. In that case, killing

this magical beast would be a great accomplishment. In other words, his team

would be the most outstanding of all the other Workers. Tenbu was a one-man

team composed of Eruya himself, so that would mean that Eruya was the

strongest of all the Workers. Luck was also an important ability for Workers.

“Someone hath appointed me to face thee, and perform several tests at the

same time… but given thy strength, I fear it is somewhat insufficient.”

Disappointment and frustration surged through his heart.

The former was because the magical beast was simply a watchman, and the

latter was because it had scorned him.

“You’re already looking down on me without even crossing blades with me?

Oi!”

“Y-yes.”

The Elf shuddered as her master addressed her. Doing so filled Eruya with

satisfaction. This was the sort of attitude that he was entitled to. While it had

just been a few days, he had to spend time around Momon, a clearly superior

class of being, and it had deeply displeased him. This eased the annoyance a

little.

“What kind of creature is that?”

“I… I’m very, very sorry. I… haven’t heard of a magical beast like that before.”

“Cheh, you’re useless.”

He smashed the useless Elf’s face with the hilt of his sword.

The Elf collapsed to the ground, shielding her face while frantically

apologizing, but Eruya paid her no heed; instead, he examined the magical

beast’s body.

The magical beast was quite large; fighting it head-on would be very

unfavorable. However, magical beasts were generally very big, and Eruya had

killed several magical beasts like this until now. There was no need to be afraid

or whatnot of a magical beast he had not seen before.

Of course, he had to be wary, but if he was too cautious and shrank from his

foe, then he would be a coward.

“I have a question; what makes you think you can beat me?”

“Well, it’s obvious at a glance that you’re very weak…”

Eruya’s face twisted, and he tightened his grip on his sword.

“…It seems those eyes of yours can’t see anything. How about I help you cut

those useless eyes out of your head?”

“I pray thee spare me. Very well, my master hath ordered this one to slay thee

here… so let us begin forthwith.”

It sounds extremely casual. That angered Eruya further.

He wanted to dispense with the pleasantries and start swinging, but if he got

angry and slashed at a magical beast who was taking things easy, he would end

up feeling like someone had gotten the better of him. Therefore, he swallowed

his anger, and snorted.

“Let’s do it, beast.”

“Speaking of which, why dost thou delay? Will those Elves not prepare as

well?”

“There’s no need. You should be having those Lizardmen behind…”

“Ah, they are not involved in this. The Lizardmen behind this one are merely

to spectate the fight. Fret not about them.”

“So you’re throwing away your only chance of victory for nothing? How

brave.”

“I thank thee for thy praise.”

Taunting it had not worked. Perhaps this magical beast could speak, but it was

not very intelligent. As Eruya pondered this, the creature’s whiskers quivered as

it addressed him:

“That said, this one must slay thee without mercy, so this one desires that

thou assault me with all thy might. After all, as this one hath said before, this is

also a test for this one.”

“A test? For a watchdog?”

“Mm~ a test to see if this one’s warrior prowess hath improved. Alright, let us

commence. This one shall not strike at the elves behind thee, but only at thy

person.”

“Do what you want.”

“This one is known as Hamsuke! Remember the name of the one who claims

thy life upon thy voyage to the next world! State thy name as well!”

“…Unfortunately, a mere beast like you doesn’t deserve to know my name.”

“Then this one shall erase you my memory as a nameless fool!”

The massive body charged over to him in an instant.

There was no way he could have imagined such a large body moving so fast. A

less talented warrior might have been shaken by the immense pressure bearing

down on him, and he would have been unable to avoid being slammed by that

huge body and taking severe wounds.

*I’m not like those mooks.*

Eruya waited until Hamsuke drew near then slid to the side, without moving

his legs.

This was the effect of [Shukuchi Kai], an improved version of the martial art

[Shukuchi].

The basic [Shukuchi] was a martial art that could only be used to shorten the

distance to one’s foe, but [Shukuchi Kai] could be used to freely move in all

directions. Sliding around without moving one’s legs was quite creepy, but very

practical.

Large movements when dodging destabilized one’s body. But one could avoid

that with [Shukuchi Kai]; in other words, one could convert a defense to an

attack while maintaining a stable center of gravity.

“Yeeart!”

He swung his sword—

“—Guuwaaargh!”

But Hamsuke’s body caught up, breaking Eruya’s slash and sending him flying.

It felt very hard.

What looked like soft fur was as hard as metal; to Eruya it was like being hit

by a wrecking ball. The impact blanked his mind out for a moment.

As he crashed heavily to the ground, he subconsciously confirmed that he

could still move.

While he had been bruised and contused, he had no broken bones and so on.

He could still fight.

However, the twin facts that he was rolling around on the ground and that he

had disgracefully taken an attack from the enemy almost made him go berserk.

However, Eruya the warrior reprimanded himself; now was not the time to be

thinking of that.

As Eruya rose to his feet, he had already grasped Hamsuke’s position, and this

time he pointed his sword forward, bracing his sword to take his opponent’s

charge.

A slippery fluid flowed from his nose. He wiped at it with one hand, and as

expected, it was blood.

“Damn piece of shit…”

Hamsuke watched Eruya rise with calm eyes. The word “observing” would

best describe the expression on its face.

Those were not a wild beast’s eyes which said, “Can I eat this? Can I beat

this?”, but a warrior’s eyes, attempting to determine the best tactics from their

brief clash just now.

*You’re using me as a touchstone for a magical beast’s growth as a warrior?!*

While it upset him, the sequence of events just now had forced him to

acknowledge that his opponent was no mere beast. The attack just now had been

a snap reaction to realizing that Eruya had circled around itself, a leaping tackle

that had struck home. While the attack itself had not been that strong, the fact

that it could respond immediately was surely due to training.

“I see… so if I keep fighting at a slow pace like this, I ought to be able to win…

Ah, I pray thee pay it no heed. This one hath never before seen a human being

who could overcome this one.”

“If you want to talk big, how about waiting until after you’ve seen this, huh?

Unlike a mere beast, warriors can use martial arts!”

He had thought he could win easily, so he had not used them. However, he no

longer had the luxury of arrogance.

“Martial Art! [Ability Boost]! [Greater Ability Boost]!”

These martial arts were his pride and joy. [Greater Ability Boost], in

particular, was a martial art that someone of Eruya’s level should never have

been able to learn.

*But I learned it, so I’m a genius! I really am very strong!*

He swung the sword in his hand. The blade was light and his movements were

smooth. The sword moved as he imagined it.

Eruya smiled thinly. Now it would be his turn to shine.

“Umu, this one remembers that one should keep a distance when one cannot

gauge an opponent’s strength, right? But this one must also face battle as a

warrior… alas, it cannot be helped.”

Hamsuke used two legs to walk over, step by step, until it was before Eruya’s

eyes.

“This one wishes to fight in close quarters; wilt thou accede to this one’s

request?”

“Don’t look down on me, beast.”

The moment it entered his attack radius, Eruya swung at his foe.

Hamsuke used its sharp claws to fend off the sword strikes that had been

made with the aid of an augmented body. No, it tried to fend it off, but it had not

succeeded completely. The blade had run over its arm. However, the force of the

blow had been dissipated, and it could not tear through its sturdy hide and slice

open the muscles beneath.

Eruya did not pull his sword back, but thrust at Hamsuke’s eyes. Some magical

beasts had a protective film on their eyes which could repel insufficiently sharp

blades, and some warriors could use Ki or an aura to deflect the strikes of an

amateur. However, Hamsuke did not seem to have such defensive abilities.

Therefore, Hamsuke would not let Eruya’s attack strike it.

Hamsuke’s body whirled, and as it evaded the thrusting blade, its tail ripped

through the air and struck at Eruya.

Eruya blocked the blow with his sword. An unbelievable impact numbed his

arm.

“Gwaargh!”

Hamsuke’s body once more became a spinning blur in his field of vision. That

meant that the same attack would be coming again.

Eruya leapt back. He had roughly grasped the length of the tail; after the tail

passed by, he would use [Shukuchi Kai] to charge back into close quarters with

the enemy.

Just as it was about to flash past his eyes, the tail suddenly stopped.

“Hnggg!”

It had been a feint. Hamsuke used this opening to regain its balance, and it

pulled its tail away at the same time. Eruya frowned, having lost the chance to

close the distance with Hamsuke.

The tail’s movements were completely different from those of the body. It

was not a rat’s tail, but a serpentine tail like that of a Chimera; it could move

independently.

“So its tail can move freely — is that it?”

Eruya altered the information on Hamsuke in his head as he rushed into its

embrace. Hamsuke had been waiting for this, and it responded to the attack.

Blade and claw crossed, and the fresh blood flying through the air came from

Eruya.

Hamsuke could attack with both sets of claws, and so he could strike more

frequently than Eruya, who only had one sword.

Close combat was not favorable to him.

His bodily attributes might have been improved, but Hamsuke was still

superior. In that case—

He used [Shukuchi Kai] to retreat.

“Umu…”

Since Hamsuke did not pursue. Eruya raised his sword, and then swung down

forcefully.

“[Void Slash]!!”

His slash ripped through the air at Hamsuke.

Hamsuke covered its face and braced itself, and its hide deflected the cutting

strike.

Since it had traveled a long distance, its damage potential decreased as well,

and it would be very hard to strike a mortal blow. However—

“So you can’t block this, can you? This is the difference between a man and a

mere beast.”

“What a headache this is…”

He kept on using [Void Slash], but Hamsuke’s hide was very hard, so breaking

through its protection would surely be very difficult. That was why he had to

keep using martial arts on its face, which ought to be the least protected.

Hamsuke remained in place, covering its face with its forelegs. It spoke

through the small gaps between its fingers.

“Wait!”

“Begging for mercy? An animal is an animal, after all.”

“No — stop bothering this one. I speak of the one within this one’s mouth…

ahhh, what a pain!”

He did not understand at all.

*Well, obviously humans wouldn’t be able to understand what beasts are saying… that*

*said, it ought to be charging over now!*

“Ahhhh, how annoying! This one shall come at thee!”

“Bring it.”

Hamsuke lacked ranged attacks, so its options were limited. It would probably

try to rush in, but that would suit Eruya’s purposes just fine.

It was difficult for [Void Slash] to strike mortal blows, so he would have to

defeat it with a direct attack. When Hamsuke ran, it did so like a beast, sticking

out its face, and during that time, Eruya could use a martial art that was more

potent than [Void Slash] to stop its movements. After that, all he would need to

do was keep attacking its face and victory was assured.

Just as Eruya smiled cruelly, certain of his victory, Hamsuke’s tail suddenly

twitched. Then—

“Abbbahhhhh!”

The tail moved like a whip, striking Eruya’s shoulder with preternatural speed.

His pauldron dented inward with a scream of tortured metal as it was crushed

with his flesh. The sound of bones breaking crackled up and down his body, and

agony flooded his brain like an electric shock.

Eruya staggered back, in so much pain that he was drooling.

The massive, serpentine tail twitched behind Hamsuke. It had become

strangely long.

“This one was saying that this one’s tail was too strong. That was why this one

wanted to end this in melee combat.”

This was bad.

Eruya swallowed a scream.

If his enemy tackled him under these conditions, his defeat was certain.

“You! You lot! What are you spacing out for! Use your magic! Heal me! Heal

me with your magic! Hurry up and help me with your magic, you damn slaves!”

After hearing her master’s order, one of the Elves hurriedly cast a spell on

him.

The pain in his shoulder vanished instantly.

“That’s not enough! Cast strengthening spells on me!”

Spells to improve one’s physical abilities, spells to briefly sharpen one’s blade,

spells to harden one’s skin, spells to improve one’s senses… Hamsuke simply

watched quietly as countless enhancing spells flew through the air.

After being buffed by several spells, the cocky smile returned to Eruya’s face.

Immense strength coursed through Eruya’s body.

He had never once lost after being strengthened by so many spells. It had been

the same regardless of the strength of his foes.

He swung his blade, which hummed through the air. The blade moved faster

than usual. This time, he was certain that he was on an even footing with his

opponent; perhaps even faster than him.

“Humans and beasts have always been separated by the difference in their

physical attributes! I’ve made up for that difference now!”

“This one originally intended to take all of thee on at once, so this was only to

be expected, no? Rather, if thou canst fight on even terms now, it would please

this one.”

“Bullshit!”

Eruya charged forward. He planned to use the power suffusing his form to

crush his foe in one hit, and keep the creature from spouting more nonsense. As

he closed in with [Shukuchi Kai] he used [Void Slash] to suppress his opponent.

“Take this!”

With a mighty cry, he swung his sword down with all his might. If the

creature’s hide was thick, then he would simply have to swing harder to cut

through it.

His blade, swung with all his might—

“[Slash]!”

A slashing attack from above him connected with his arms.

Something spun through the air, then landed heavily on the ground. He heard

the ear-piercing sound of metal, and a sound like a wet sack splattering on the

ground.

Eruya could not understand it.

His arms — which had still been holding his sword just now — had vanished.

Even as blood spurted from the severed stumps in time with his heartbeat, he

could not accept reality.

Agony coursed up from his arms. Some distance away, his arms fell to the

ground, still holding on to his sword.

Only after seeing that fact did Eruya finally grasp what had just happened.

He stumbled back from Hamsuke and screeched:

“My arms, my aaaarrrrmmmms! Heal… heal me, hurry up and heal me!

Hurry!”

The Elves did not move.

The silent glee of the tormented lit up their clouded eyes.

“Marvelous! A resounding success! This one can use martial arts! Now Milord

shall surely lavish praise upon this one!”

“Aiiiiiieeeee!”

Eruya wailed hoarsely.

In this world where creatures stronger than humanity roamed, adventuring

meant that pain was a constant companion.

Eruya had experienced many sorts of pain. He had been struck by lightning,

burned with fire, froze by cold, his bones had been broken, he had been mauled,

slashed and bludgeoned, but through it all, he had never lost his weapon. That

was only common sense; in this world, releasing one’s weapon indirectly equaled

death. No, he was confident that as long as he held his sword in his hand, he

could overcome any difficulty.

And in this moment, his self-confidence was shattered.

This was the first time in his life Eruya had taken such a great blow.

“My arms! Hurry!”

Fresh blood kept spraying, and his body started turning cold from the wounds

out and became heavy.

As they heard Eruya’s pitiful screaming, the Elves were all smiles.

Just as Eruya was at a loss to describe the emotions bursting in his heart, a

voice bearing a hint of kindness reached his ears.

“My thanks to thee! This one does not delight in tormenting others, so I shall

dispatch thee forthwith.”

There was a *whoosh.*

A moment later, something hit Eruya’s face. The pain was such that he even

forgot about his arms, as though his entire being had been shattered.

That was the last burst of agony Eruya experienced in his life.

# 

●

# 

The corpse with the half-smashed face collapsed to the ground with a *thud*.

Hamsuke nodded, and then backed off. If it stood by the corpse, they probably

would not dare approach the man’s body. While the Elves looked like magic

casters, they might come at Hamsuke with swords like this man. Hamsuke did

not wish to stop them from doing so.

“Alright, wilt thou not come at me…?”

After leaving the corpse, Hamsuke began to speak, but its words trailed off.

That was because the Elves were giggling as they kicked the body of the warrior

who should have been their ally.

“But why? Is this how Elves inter the deceased?”

It tried to articulate its words, but the feeling was completely wrong. That was

because there was a look of delight in their darkened, cloudy eyes. No matter

how one looked at it, it could not be anything other than malice.

“…Oh, what a headache.”

Hamsuke had used the techniques it had been honing until today upon the

intruder, in order to show the fruits of its training. It had only fought for that

reason, but would attacking a non-hostile opponent truly count as showing the

results of its training? Hamsuke hoped that they would challenge it, at the very

least.

“Apparently, all one needs to do is to give verbal provocation… but what

manner of provocation should I use? This one does not understand… it cannot

be helped; I shall wait for Milord to contact me. Oh, yes…”

It turned back, to the Lizardmen who were rating its performance.

“Zaryusu-dono, how was it? Did this one pass muster?”

“Yes, you did very well. You definitely used a martial art just now.”

The Lizardman who had tutored it in warrior techniques nodded, and

Hamsuke smiled broadly.

“How wonderful! Will it be armor lessons after this?”

“Yes. We’ll start from light armor, and then slowly go heavier.”

Hamsuke had not been able to wear armor until now, because wearing armor

made it thoroughly uncomfortable and it could not move freely. Normal

movement and running were fine, but once it entered battle, it lost its balance

when swinging its tail, and it could not accurately strike its target with its tail.

Therefore, it had taken the Lizardmen as its tutors, and trained as they directed.

“This Hamsuke shall become stronger for the sake of Milord, so Milord will

look upon me with different eyes! But how much longer must this one practice

before this one can count as a full-fledged warrior? Hamsuke shall be a warrior!”

“Well… I’d say you could be a warrior in one, maybe two more months,

Hamsuke-san.”

“…That’s so far off!”

“I feel it’s already been going very fast, Hamsuke. Normal people take a year

before learning martial arts. From that point of view, you’ve grown fast enough,”

added Zenberu, the Lizardman standing beside Zaryusu.

“Is that so?”

“Indeed. You’ve fought live battles and been healed for your wounds, then

enhanced with support magic and made to fight enemies stronger than yourself

in death battles. After that hellish regime, you’ve made quite a lot of progress.”

Hamsuke’s body trembled. The two lizardmen trembled as well. They all

recalled the training they had received.

“…I pray that our next training session will not call the word ‘death’ to this

one’s mind.”

“Personally, I think you grow stronger more easily when you fight on the edge

of life and death… that’s just a personal opinion, though. Besides, it would be a

bit of a shame if our newly-wedded husband lost his life in training.”

“Ohhh! Indeed, thou art wed, are you not?”

“Yes. That’s because she seems to be with child.”

“That’s an excellent warrior for you, he’s got good accuracy. How many shots

did it take, two, three maybe?”

Zaryusu punched Zenberu on the shoulder.

“Enough idle talk, let’s start training. What should we do about the Elves over

there?”

“Ah, let’s leave them there for now.”

The Elves which had been kicking and beating the corpse sank into a sitting

position on the ground, like puppets whose strings had been cut. Hamsuke could

not sense any will to fight from them. Therefore, Hamsuke decided that unless

his master gave the order, or they tried to flee, he would leave them alone.

*Intermission*

# 

There was a slight change in the movement in the air before its nose, which

woke the Dragon whose alias was the Platinum Dragon Lord — Tsaindorcus

Vaision — from his light slumber.

What filled its waking consciousness was the emotion of surprise. It would

not have been a stretch to call it shock, even.

The keen sensory abilities of Dragons far exceeded those of humanity. Even if

their foes concealed themselves or tried to deceive them with illusions, Dragons

could instantly sense their opponents from far away, even when they were sound

asleep.

As a Dragon Lord, his senses were more acute than that of the average Dragon.

That being the case, anyone who could come this close to himself must be

possessed of incredible abilities.

Even a long-lived being like himself only knew of a few beings with such

abilities. First were its fellow Dragon Lords. Then, one of the Thirteen Heroes

who was no longer in this world, the assassin Izaniya. And then, there was—

As he sensed the person his mind was sketching, Tsaindorcus Vaision — Tsa,

for short — quirked up the corner of its mouth and slowly opened its eyes.

To the eyes of a Dragon, the darkest night was as the brightest day.

In front of the presence which he had sensed was an old human woman

standing proudly, with a stylish by her waist. She had evaded his keen senses and

come all the way here — a prankster’s smile spread over her age-wrinkled face.

“It’s been a while.”

Tsa did not answer, simply regarded the old lady.

Her head of white hair showed how long she had lived. However, her face

overflowed with a childish vibrancy on her face which did not match her years.

Age might have made her skinny and weak, but it had not changed her heart.

Tsa compared how she was now to how she had been in his memories. The

old lady’s brows stood up, at a dangerous angle.

“What’s this? Can’t even spare a greeting for an old friend? Oh my, to think

even Dragons could go senile.”

Tsa bared his fangs and laughed amiably.

“Forgive me. Seeing an old friend moved me so much that I shuddered, so I

was unable to speak for a moment.”

It was hard to believe that such a gentle voice could come from such a massive

frame. In contrast, the old lady’s reply was exactly as Tsa had expected, full of

sarcasm.

“Old friend? My old friend is that empty suit of armor over there… beaten up

though it might be.”

In the past, Tsa had traveled with the old lady and her group by controlling an

empty suit of armor as a substitute for himself. Therefore, when his true identity

had come out, his companions had been furious about being tricked. The

resentment from back then still had not died out, and she was still making digs

at him until now.

On the one hand, he hoped that she would give him a break. On the other, he

felt that being able to banter with an old friend like this was a joyous thing.

Their usual conversation brought a smile to Tsa’s face, and then it noticed the

old lady’s finger.

“Hm? The ring seems to have vanished. Where did you put it? I recall nobody

should be able to take anything from you… but that *is* a powerful magic item

beyond the domain of humanity. I hope it hasn’t reached the hands of dangerous

elements; particularly the Black Scripture of the Slaine Theocracy.”

“Trying to change the topic, are we? Still, your eyes are sharp; is that the

Draconic treasure sense at work… oh well, that’s fine. I gave it to a young man.

Don’t worry about it.”

That item was not something that could be simply given away.

It was a magic item made through the use of Wild Magic. The power of magic

today was polluted and distorted, so making another such item was very

difficult. As one of the rare few practitioners of Wild Magic, it wanted very much

to ask her where exactly the ring had gone.

However, it trusted its friends implicitly.

“Really now. Well, since you decided to give it away, I doubt you’d have gone

wrong… right, I heard that you were an adventurer once, am I correct? Are you

here on business?”

“Of course not. I came to look up a friend to have fun. I’ve already retired, and

I’m no longer an adventurer. Don’t ask a little old lady like me to work so hard;

I’ve turned my duties over to that crybaby.”

“That crybaby?”

Tsa thought for a while and then a flash of inspiration struck.

“…You mean her?”

“Yes, little Miss Inberun.”

“Ah~”

Tsa sounded dumbfounded.

“You’re probably the only one who can call her little.”

“Oh, really? You’re even more qualified to call her little. I’m about the same

age as that girl, but you ought to be older, right?”

“That is true… still, I can’t believe that girl would be willing to be an

adventurer. What kind of scheme did you use?”

“Hmph. That crybaby went on and on and wouldn’t stop, so I said, ‘If I can

beat you, then you’ll have to listen to me,’ and then I smacked the crap out of

her!”

The old lady went “kakaka.” Her laughter seemed to come from the bottom

of her heart.

“…I think you’re the only human who could beat that girl.”

Tsa sounded like it had broken out in a cold sweat, and shook its head. At the

same time, it recalled another one of its old friends — one who had fought the

Demon Gods by its side, who had performed great deeds in the battle against the

Vermin Demon God.

“Well, I had friends helping me out. Besides, if you know the undead, you

know how to beat the undead. If you can’t defeat the power of the Earth, you can

still exploit elemental affinities and compatibilities to turn the tables in your

favor. Crybaby is very strong, but others are stronger than her. For instance, you

could easily beat that girl. If you didn’t limit yourself, you would be the most

powerful being in this world.”

The old lady’s gaze shifted to the suit of platinum armor. The old lady

imagined she would have received a casual answer, but Tsa’s voice was grave.

“I don’t know about that. The power that pollutes the world might have

started moving once more.”

There was a hole on the armor’s right pauldron, like it had been pierced by a

lance.

“…Have the hundred-year aftershocks arrived? They aren’t on the side of the

world like Leader was?”

“…It might have just been an unfortunate encounter, but I feel that Vampire

was of an evil nature. Speaking of which, while I guessed that it would be about

time, I don’t know if it’s good luck or bad that actually brought me into contact

with someone who could verify the other side.”

“Pick whichever side of the coin you like. Oh yes, I’ve mentioned this before,

but why not ask the other Dragon Lords for help?”

“The answer is still the same; it’s very difficult. After all, they’re all people

who didn’t fight in the war with the Eight Greed Kings. For instance, I feel the

Heavenly Dragon Lord — who only knows how to fly around in the sky — or the

Deep Darkness Dragon Lord — who hides in that massive underground cave

doing who knows what — won’t possibly help us.”

“Really now. Aren’t there others like the Brightness Dragon Lord, Dragon

Lords who had children with humanity? Try talking to them; who knows, things

might turn out well, you know?”

“…Perhaps. But I personally feel that it would be better to wake up she who

sleeps in the bottom-most levels of the city which floats upon the sea for help.

You’d have better chances for success.”

“She’s ‘waiting in the land of dreams,’ huh? If only we had preserved all of

Leader’s knowledge, things would not be so troublesome. He died too young.”

“It can’t be helped. He… killed a comrade (Player) he had spent his journey

with, and it got to him. I can understand why he’d decline the resurrection.

Rigrit, you were shocked too, right?”

The old lady looked into the distance, and she slowly nodded with a pained

expression on her face.

“Aye, yes… it’s true… you’re right.”

“Rigrit, I apologize for asking this of you even though you’re no longer an

adventurer, but can I beg a favor of you?”

“What is it? I’ve got a pretty good idea, but I want to hear it from you.”

Tsa’s eyes went to a sword. The sword did not look suitable for slashing, but

its edge was sharp beyond comparison. It was of a standard that modern magic

could not possibly make.

This sword — one of the eight great weapons which the Eight Greed Kings

left behind — was the reason why Tsa could not leave this place.

“I’ve been doing this until now, and I hope you can lend me a hand. I’d like

you to collect information about magic items that can rival that sword over

there… that can rival Guild Weapons. Or perhaps, special items from *Yggdrasil*

like the strengthened armor which Red Drop — adamantite-ranked adventurers

of the Kingdom — possesses.”



# Chapter 4 A Handful of Hope

Chapter 4 | A Handful of Hope

## 

## 

## 

## 

# 

# *1*

# 

# 

# 

Such was the ferocity of the attack that it resembled a flood from a broken

dam.

The enemy was only a mass of low-tier undead. They were nothing for

Foresight to be afraid of. However, what could only be described as a human

wave attack showed no signs of stopping.

Hekkeran wiped the sweat off his face after beating his tenth group of

opponents since the start of the battle, a pair of Ghasts.

Although he wanted to rest, there was no time for it. He gulped some water

from a pouch on his waist, and signaled a retreat as he calmed his breathing

down. However, or rather, as expected, the enemy had no intention of giving

them any time to rest.

A composite party of three Skeleton Warriors, each holding round shields, and

a pair of robed Skeleton Mages with staves in hand jumped out of a side passage.

“Conserve your mana!”

“Got it.”

“—Fully understood.”

In a situation like this where they could be surprised at any time, magic—

which could easily deal with any situation—was a trump card they could not use

casually. Because of this, they had conserved as much of their mana as possible.

That being said, several of their abilities with limited uses per day had already

been exhausted. This was the result of being swamped by the large number of

traps and undead.

There were Skeleton Archers lined up behind barred windows, and out of

swords’ reach. It was difficult to put them down since the Skeletons were

resistant to piercing attacks, but Roberdyck was able to turn the undead.

He was also able to eradicate the undead that were throwing bottles of

poisonous gas at them.

When the Floor Imitators who glued their victims to the ground attacked in

tandem with flying undead, Roberdyck destroyed them one after the other with

his ability to turn undead.

He also exorcised a mixed team of several undead that could cause status

ailments like poison, disease, and curse.

As a result, Roberdyck only had a few uses of undead turning left. Conversely,

they had managed to conserve other abilities as well as mana. The only tough

battle had been the one where something like a Flesh Golem had been mixed

into a battalion of Zombies.

“Warning! Multiple footsteps from behind!”

“Undead reaction! There’s six of them!”

As Imina shouted her warning—followed immediately by Roberdyck—

tensions ran high. The reason why the five skeletons ahead of them had not yet

launched an attack was probably because they were waiting for a chance to

execute a pincer attack.

Hekkeran considered their next move.

Several options appeared on a list in his mind. First, they could make a pre-

emptive attack on the enemies in front of them and bring them down. Or they

could launch a suppressing attack on the enemies in front of them, then turn to

attack their pursuers. This plan would require good observation skills to

determine the strength of the forces in front and behind them, then take on the

weaker group first. They could also use magic to hinder one side, then take the

opportunity to break through the other.

They were all effective, but none of them could turn the situation around. In

a moment of inspiration, Hekkeran decided to trust his instincts.

“Hekkeran! What shall we do?”

“Turn back! There’s a path to the side! Retreat there!”

The instant his voice rang out, Imina, who had been the rear guard, began

running. Arche and Roberdyck followed her. Hekkeran was one step behind

them.

The fact that Imina was running meant that it was not an impossible distance.

His other teammates were running with all their might, and so Hekkeran ran as

fast as he could. The enemy would not let them escape easily, of course; they

heard the footsteps of several undead pursuing them relentlessly.

“Have a taste of this!”

Hekkeran took out a bag of alchemical glue and tossed it behind him.

The alchemical fluid splashed out and spread over the ground.

The results were immediate; the sound of footsteps stopped instantly.

Intelligent undead might have made a detour, but such thinking was

impossible for lesser undead. Furthermore, Skeletons lacked muscle power, and

thus they found it very difficult to break free once they were stuck.

“More undead reactions! Four from the right!”

“It’s a wall!”

“No, it’s an illusion!”

Four Ghouls charged through the wall at. Although they were scrawny undead

that were little more than skin and bones, they were still a fearsome sight when

attacking with their outstretched yellowed claws. That said, there was nobody

on this team who would be frightened by such an attack.

“Don’t look down on me!”

Seemingly unaffected by the ambush, Imina immediately unsheathed her

shortsword and swung it at a Ghoul’s neck. Dirty-looking fluid oozed out in place

of blood, and it fell. Beside her, Roberdyck swung his mace with all his might and

crushed another Ghoul’s skull.

Judging that it was safe to leave those two alone, Hekkeran turned his

attention to the rear. They were still being chased. Should he throw another bag

of glue just to be on the safe side?

Just as Hekkeran was about to toss one, the shape of a terrifying undead being

loomed into view.

“Elder Lich!”

At the same time, he noticed lightning crackling on the lich’s finger. Hekkeran

was familiar with the spell in question.

[Lightning] produced a straight line of piercing electricity, and there was only

one way to dodge it.

“—Push the ghouls back!”

Neither Imina nor Roberdyck understood why Hekkeran gave that command,

but they obeyed without hesitation.

A bolt of white lightning flashed across the hallway just as the four of them

pushed the ghouls through the illusionary wall.

The air crackled, and Hekkeran felt a magic circle activate under his feet. In

the next moment, they were enveloped in an unavoidable pale blue light, and the

scenery before them changed.

“Be careful! Stay alert!…?”

Although the Ghouls had vanished and the surroundings were different, they

were still on edge from the battle. Even so, after such an unexpected occurrence,

it was no surprise that they were dumbfounded for a few moments.

Hekkeran shook his head, regaining his focus. The most basic thing he had to

do—although learning about their current situation was also important—was to

ensure the safety of his comrades.

Imina, Arche, and Roberdyck.

All the other members of Foresight had maintained their formation as the

magic circle activated, and nobody was missing.

After mutually confirming that they were all safe and sound, the four of them

continued observing their surroundings.

This place was a wide corridor, dimly lit and with a high ceiling. Even a Giant

could walk freely through here. The flickering flames of faraway torches

provided unsteady illumination, and in their light the long shadows seemed to

dance. Along the tunnel and ahead of them was some kind of latticed gate, like a

portcullis. Rays of white, magical light shone through the gaps in its surface.

Behind them, the path stretched into darkness, and along the way, several doors

opening into the corridor could be seen, lit up by torches.

With everyone remaining quiet, only the crackling of the torches could be

heard.

In any event, they did not seem to be in any danger of being attacked

immediately. After they realized this, their tension eased.

“Although I don’t know where this place is, it has a completely different

atmosphere to what we’ve seen up until now.”

The style of this place was completely different to the tomb they had just left.

In fact, signs of civilization could be seen here. The members of Foresight

surveyed their surroundings, and whilst they were trying to grasp where this

place was, only Arche’s attitude was different from the rest.

“—This place is…”

Keenly perceiving the meaning behind the words, Hekkeran asked Arche:

“Do you know? Or perhaps you have a clue?”

“—I know of a similar place. The Empire’s grand arena.”

“Ah… indeed, you are right.”

Roberdyck grunted in agreement. Although Hekkeran and Imina did not say

anything, they also shared Roberdyck’s opinion.

When Foresight had made their debut at the arena, they had passed through

a place similar to this one when they were making their way from the waiting

room to the arena.

“That means the arena should be behind that.”

Roberdyck pointed towards the latticed gate.

“That should be the case… then being teleported to this place means that… is

that what it is?”

They were to fight in an arena. Although, they had no idea who or what might

be waiting for them.

“—It’s dangerous. Long-distance teleportation is reckoned to be fifth-tier

magic. Being able to use that kind of magic as a trap has only been heard of in

stories. This site must have been constructed by someone with unimaginable

skill in magic. It’s not favorable for us to accept the opponent’s invitation. I

suggest we proceed in the opposite direction.”

“But, if we accepted the opponent’s invitation, don’t you think there might be

a path to survival? Wouldn’t rejecting the invitation antagonize the other side?”

“Both sides seem dangerous. Rober, what do you think?”

“There’s a case to be made for both arguments. But I have some doubts about

what Arche-san has said. Is this really a trap laid by the person who currently

lives here? Could it be that they’re just using something created by an unknown

third party?”

They looked at each other and exhaled in unison. There was no point in

staying here and discussing the matter further. They did not have enough

information and their opinions did not match, but they had to make a decision

right now.

“—What Rober said makes sense. Who know, maybe it was made five hundred

years ago.”

“Ah. Magical techniques were more advanced in the past.”

“Are you referring to the beings that dominated the continent and whose

country shattered almost immediately, of which only the capital remains today?”

“—The Eight Greed Kings. They are considered to be the ones who spread the

existence of magic through this world. If this is a relic of that era, then

perhaps…”

“…I see. Then I’m in favor of heading out to the arena. In any case, since we

were brought here by a trap, they would not allow us to escape.”

In response to Roberdyck’s statement, everyone nodded, gathered up their

determination, and began moving.

When they approached the gate, it rose upward with impressive speed, as

though it had been waiting for them all this time. The first thing they saw as they

entered the arena were rows upon rows of audience seats around the arena.

The arena was no less impressive than the one in the Empire. In fact, it might

have been even more so, given that it was covered in lanterns enchanted with

[Continual Light], which lit the grounds up as brightly as if it were the day.

Everyone in Foresight was astonished, especially when they glimpsed the

audience above them.

This was because sitting there were innumerable clay figures, the dolls known

as Golems.

Golems were inorganic creatures created through magical means, who would

obediently carry out their master’s commands once they received them.

Without the need for food or sleep, and immune to fatigue and even the ravages

of time, they were treasured as guardians and laborers. Furthermore, because

their production took considerable time, effort and cost, even the weakest ones

commanded a formidable price.

Even Hekkeran and the others, who were paid well, would find it hard to

purchase a golem.

They were valuable constructs, and this arena seemed to be overflowing with

them.

To Hekkeran, it spoke of how wealthy the person who owned this arena was,

as well as how lonely he felt.

They looked briefly at each other’s faces, as though they had already come

here many times before, and then they walked silently towards the center of the

arena.

“Outside?”

In response to Imina’s voice, they looked up, and saw the night sky. The

surrounding illumination was strong and eclipsed the light of the stars, but even

so, there was no doubt that this arena was open to the night sky.

“Were we teleported outside?”

“Then, we could use flight magic to escape—”

“TOOOOOH!”

A figure jumped from the balcony of the VIP box, in time with the voice that

had interrupted Arche’s words.

The figure somersaulted in mid-air as it descended from a height that seemed

roughly equivalent to a six-story building, making people wonder if it might have

wings as it gracefully landed upon the ground. There was no magic at work there,

only pure physical ability. Even the rogue Imina had her breath taken away by

the perfection of the movement.

The figure who had absorbed the impact with a mere flexing of its knees

smiled brightly.

Before them stood a young Dark Elf boy.

The long ears which emerged from amongst the golden, silky strands of his

hair twitched slightly, and he smiled as brightly as the sun.

He was fully dressed in a suit of tight-fitting, light leather armor, made from

jet black and deep crimson Dragon scales, over which he wore a white vest

embroidered with golden threads. There was an emblem sewn onto the breast

of the jacket.

Seeing his heterochromic eyes, Imina let out a gasp of surprise.

“—Ah!”

“—The challengers have arrived!”

The boy spoke into the rod-like object he was holding in his hand, and his

amplified words resounded throughout the arena.

The arena trembled and shuddered in time with the boy’s bright and cheerful

voice.

Looking around, it seemed that the golems which had remained motionless

so far were stomping on the ground to make noise.

“The challengers are four reckless fools who have invaded the Great

Underground Tomb of Nazarick! And, facing them is the master of the Great

Underground Tomb of Nazarick, the Supreme King of Death, Ainz! Ooal! Gown-

sama!”

The portcullis on the opposite side of the arena rose upwards at the same time

as the Dark Elf’s voice rang out. From the darkness of the path beyond, a being

stepped into the light. In a word, it was skeletal.

Crimson radiance flickered within the eye sockets of the white skull.

It was dressed in a gown-like vestment, and because there were no muscles

where the robe was cinched about the waist, it appeared unbelievably skinny.

Judging by the fact that it held no weapons, it was probably a magic caster of

some kind.

“Ooh! And walking in behind him is our Guardian Overseer, Albedo!”

The members of Foresight held their breath as they saw the woman who

followed behind like a servant.

She was a peerless vision that surpassed even the Beautiful Princess of

Darkness (Nabe). Hers was a beauty that could never be reached by human

beings, and two horns curved out gently from both sides of her forehead. At her

waist were a pair of black wings. They looked so realistic that they could not

possibly have been artificially created.

The arena quaked with stomping, as if to welcome the debut of these two new

entrants, before turning into thunderous applause. It was a reception befitting

the arrival of a king.

The two people approached Foresight amidst the thunderous applause from

the surrounding Golems.

“—I’m so sorry,” Arche muttered. “We ended up like this because of me.”

What would follow was probably going to be the most grueling battle

Foresight would ever have faced. In all likelihood, one or more of them might

die. Arche probably felt that they had been plunged into such a dire circumstance

was because of herself. Without her debt, perhaps they might not have accepted

this task to go investigate a tomb they so obviously did not know enough about.

However—

“Oi oi, what nonsense is this girl babbling?”

“Indeed. It was everyone’s decision to go on this job. It had nothing to do with

you. Don’t you think we’d have done it anyway even if you hadn’t said anything?”

“That’s how it is, so there’s no need to be worried.”

Hekkeran and Roberdyck smiled as they spoke, and Imina patted Arche’s

head.

“Well then, although there’s no point planning now, we should still have a

discussion. Arche, can you identify that undead creature?”

“—Seeing that it seems intelligent, perhaps it’s an upper-class skeleton-type?”

The skeleton in question, Ainz, waved his hand before them. The movement

looked as if he was wiping something away.

The sounds disappeared. In an instant, the golems’ movements stopped, and

the almost painful silence returned. Hekkeran bowed politely to Ainz, who was

slowly turning to face them.

“Firstly I would like to apologize, Ainz Ooal …dono.”

“…That’s Ainz Ooal Gown.”

“My apologies. Ainz Ooal Gown-dono.”

Ainz stopped and raised his chin, as if he were waiting for an inferior to

continue.

“We wish to apologize for entering your tomb without permission. If you can

find it in your heart to forgive us, we will gladly pay the appropriate

compensation to atone for our transgressions.”

Time passed in silence. Then Ainz sighed. Of course, as one of the undead,

Ainz had no need to breathe. However, he did so in order to get his message

across.

“Is that how you do things where you come from? After someone else eats in

your home and leaves waste behind which sprouts maggots, would you actually

show him more mercy than a swift death?”

“Humans are not maggots!”

“They are the same. At least, they are to me. Or not — perhaps humans are

even lower than them. If a maggot is born, the fault lies with the fly. You,

however, are different. You were not dragged along against your will, nor do you

have any particularly compelling reason to come here, but you attacked a tomb

which might have had people living in it, with the intention of plundering its

treasures, purely for the sake of satisfying your *worthless* greed!”

Ainz laughed.

“Ah, do not take it to heart. I am not blaming you. It is only natural for the

strong to take from the weak. I have done it myself and I do not consider myself

an exception from this rule. It was precisely because there might be someone

stronger than me that I was on guard… Now then, the time for idle banter is

over. In accordance with the principle of the strong feeding upon the weak, I

shall claim one thing from you.”

“No, actually, there’s a good rea—”

“Silence!” Ainz declared in a voice which allowed no interruption. “Do not

upset me with your lies! Now then, you shall pay for your foolish mistake with

your life.”

“What if we had permission?”

Ainz froze. Apparently, that had gotten through to him.

Hekkeran was surprised that a single sentence could have had such a great

effect, but of course he did not let it show on his face. Just when all seemed lost,

a ray of hope had shone through the darkness. Clearly, he had to seize it.

“…Nonsense.”

It was a still, small voice, almost on the verge of fading away.

“Utter nonsense, it’s nothing but a bluff. What do you gain from angering

me?”

His unease was spreading, and even the Dark Elf boy beside him was starting

to look uncomfortable. When he turned to look at the last person, goosebumps

broke out all over Hekkeran’s body.

The beauty behind them was still smiling. But she radiated a murderous intent

that beaded Hekkeran’s brow with sweat.

“And what if it was true?”

“…No… no… it must be a bluff. Absolutely impossible. You should all be

offerings dancing in the palm of my hand…”

Ainz shook his head and fixed Hekkeran with a gaze that seemed to bore right

through him.

“But… however… I… yes, that’s right, just in case, I will hear you out… who

gave you this permission?”

“Don’t you know him?”

“Him…?”

“He didn’t leave his name, but he was a pretty big monster.”

Hekkeran desperately thought on where the goal line was, where he could

evade danger.

It was a question that only a person paralyzed by indecision would ask,

because only by asking could a person know what was true or false.

*It’s as though he’s human,* Hekkeran thought. This was not the reaction of a

monster, but of a coward. This was a good chance.

“Tell me what he looked like.”

“…He was very very very big…”

“Very very big…”

As Ainz descended into another round of introspection, Hekkeran reflected

that they had avoided danger yet again, and breathed an internal sigh of relief.

He gestured to his colleagues with small movements of his fingers, telling them

to find an escape route. Ainz would not act without confirming the truth or

falsehood of Hekkeran’s words. This was all the time they had to think of how

to get out of here.

“What did he tell you?”

*Who knows, someone might have used a charm or dominate spell or some other*

*special ability…*

“Before that, I hope that you can guarantee our safety.”

“What? …If you have indeed gained the permission of one of my friends, then

your safety is assured. Do not be afraid.”

A new word — friend.

Hekkeran analyzed the information he had just obtained. From the events of

the negotiation, he had learned that Ainz Ooal Gown had friends, which he was

currently not in contact with.

The secret of trickery was to expose the information your mark wanted, and

then force him into a mistake.

“…Well? Why so quiet? Then let me hear what the person you met said to

you.”

He had made it across all the goal lines so far. Now he had to do it again. His

palms sweated profusely.

“He said to give his regards to Ainz in the Great Underground Tomb of

Nazarick.”

“…Ainz?”

His fidgeting suddenly stopped. Hekkeran noticed, and an “oh crap”

expression spread across his face.

“…He said, to give his regards to Ainz?”

Hekkeran steeled himself. After all, words spoken could not be taken back.

“…Yes.”

“Kuhahahahaha!”

Ainz laughed when he heard Hekkeran’s answer. This was not a happy laugh.

It was a laugh that could be best described as volcanic.

“Hah… well, so much for that. Though really, when you think about it calmly,

there were bound to be holes aplenty in that story.”

Ainz’s movements stopped, and he turned to look at Hekkeran. The crimson

fires blazing in his eye sockets turned dark, consumed by the black which

surrounded them and reducing his pupils to points of red light. Hekkeran and

the others took a step back, as though Ainz’s mere line of sight was exerting

physical pressure on them.

Within that glare was the purest rage.

**“YOU TRAAAAAAAASSHHHH! YOU DARE! YOU DARE TO TREAD YOUR**

**FILTHYYYYYY! YOUR FILTHY BOOTS INTO THE NAZARICK THAT I,**

**THAT WE, MY FRIENDS AND I, CREATED!”**

So intense was his fury that Ainz was struck speechless. His shoulder blades

moved as though he were breathing deeply, and he continued.

**“AND YOU! YOU DARE USE THE NAME OF ME, OF MY TREASURED**

**FRIENDS! YOU DARE USE IT TO TRICK ME! YOU SHITS! DO YOU THINK**

**THAT CAN EVER, EVER BE FORGIVEN?!”**

Ainz was screaming furiously.

It would not have been a surprise if his anger had gone on forever. However,

his rancor suddenly vanished, and he returned to his usual calm.

It was a sudden change, as though the emotion had simply been switched off.

The abrupt change was enough to make Hekkeran and his team, who were facing

off against Ainz, think that something was amiss.

“…Although it made me angry, the fault does not lie with you. Of course you

would tell an outrageous lie to preserve your lives. To tell you the truth, I’m still

very mad… I guess I’m still too willful. Albedo. Aura. And all the Guardians who

can hear my voice, everyone, cover your ears!”

The absolute beauty and the Dark Elf boy listened intently. The boy stuck his

fingers into his ears, while the beauty delicately covered her ears with her hands.

This was without a doubt to show that they were not going to listen to what he

said.

“From the beginning, I was opposed to this plan to invite filthy thieves into

my Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick. But that said, I understand that this

was the best method and I accept it.”

Ainz looked back up, and regretfully shook his head.

“Well, that’s all. Rant over. As a final mercy, I wanted to grant you a warrior’s

death, but now I’ve changed my mind. Now I will dispose of you like the thieves

that you are.”

While talking as though it were somebody else’s problem, Ainz shed his gown.

Naturally, there were bones below. A dark red orb floated under his ribs,

emanating a feeling of dread. He had nothing on besides his pants and greaves…

No, there was one more item. There was a leather collar around his neck, with a

chain, broken halfway down, dangling from it.

“Ohhhhh!”

A strange sound came from above them.

Looking up, they could see the upper body of a silver-haired girl leaning out

of the VIP box. She was immediately pulled back by a blue-gauntleted hand.

“…What the hell is she doing?”

“I’ll go scold her later.”

By the time they had managed to recover their senses and focus them back

onto Ainz, he had produced a single-bladed black sword and a round black shield

out of nowhere.

“Then, I’m ready over here. Let’s get started.”

He slightly spread his feet out—it was a fighting stance.

“Albedo and Aura, you can stop covering your ears now.”

The two people addressed reacted immediately, and returned their hands to

their sides.

“I’m in a very bad mood now. To think I would encounter fellows like this. So

I’ll toy with them without killing them, and I’ll leave the disposal to you. Now,

let’s begin.”

As Hekkeran stared down the sword-and-shield-equipped Ainz, Hekkeran’s

first thought was that his opponent was not a warrior or a swordsman. If

pressed, he would say that he was like a monster, the kind who would use their

excellent physical abilities to overwhelm their opponent.

Both his posture and stance looked like those of an amateur. But he radiated

a heavy pressure, appearing larger than life.

For a being like this, the fearsome move they could make might be to simply

attack.

“Not coming? Then, allow me.”

Ainz rushed over as he replied.

His was a frightening speed that shrunk the distance between him and his foes

to nothing in an instant.

He followed it up with a grand slash downwards from above.

The attack had openings all over it, but it had great destructive power. In the

hands of a mighty being with incredible physical ability, it was a sword strike

that could kill anything it hit.

—Taking it would be very dangerous.

Hekkeran came to this conclusion in an instant, as he sensed the high-speed

blade descending on him. A hard block would turn this into a contest of power,

and he knew that he would be overwhelmed if he pitted his strength against Ainz.

That being the case, there was only one option—

Ainz’s sword struck down into the ground, the lingering echo and vibration of

steel against steel fading into the air.

—Parry the blow and guide it away from his body.

Normally, an attacker would be thrown off balance after being parried, and

this would be a prime chance for a counterattack. But Ainz had not even moved.

It was as though he knew that particular sequence of events was going to take

place, and he had reset his stance to its original position.

Hekkeran realized that he had made a big mistake.

*No good! I underestimated him! But, the only thing I can do is fight on!*

He aimed at Ainz’s head. He used a martial art—

“[Twin Blade Strike]!”

The two swords inscribed gleaming arcs in the air as they scissored toward

Ainz’s head. Normally, bludgeoning weapons would be more effective against a

skeleton-type enemy like Ainz, but Hekkeran was more adept with slashing

weapons, and not nearly as proficient with blunt weapons.

His main objective was to try to inflict some damage on Ainz. He flurried as

many attacks as he could against Ainz, not caring if they hit or missed, in the

hope that at least one of them would get through and strike him.

The twin swords sped toward his opponent’s head.

An average person would have taken it full-on.

A first-rate opponent might have only been scratched.

Then what about an absolutely top-class opponent?

“Hnh!”

Ainz interposed his shield in the path of the swords. Normal people would not

have been able to accomplish it, but with overwhelming physical strength and

speed, it was possible.

“—[Magic Arrow]!”

“[Lesser Dexterity]!”

As the shield blocked the two strikes, Arche’s spell sent a white bolt streaking

towards Ainz. At the same time, while the sound of clashing metal still rang in

the air, Roberdyck cast a spell to augment Hekkeran’s agility.

“Child’s play.”

Ainz did not even bother looking at Arche. The missile of light flickered and

faded out of existence before it even managed to touch Ainz. A shocked

expression appeared on Arche’s face.

“Spell immunity? But from where?”

“Hmph!”

In response, Ainz swung his shield at Hekkeran’s face.

*A shield bash, is it!*

The widely known basics of fighting skills resounded in his head. Hekkeran

decided to turn this danger into an opportunity, and made his move. He aimed

at the belly, reasoning that the bulk of the shield would create a blind spot in the

defense.

However, Ainz easily swept his weapons aside with the black sword.

*—He saw through it!*

His eyes followed the wall-like shield as it approached, and he barely evaded

the blow by the skin of his teeth—and then a greave kicked at him from below.

A normal kick was nothing to be afraid of. However, through their brief

exchange of arms, he was fully aware that due to Ainz’s incredible strength—

despite having no muscles to speak of—any attack he made could kill him in a

single blow. Taking the hit was tantamount to taking a mortal wound.

Hekkeran frantically rolled away. Without Roberdyck’s support, it would have

been impossible. The vacuum in the kick’s passing sliced off several of his hairs,

and a chill raced up and down his spine.

“This way!”

Imina launched two arrows from her bow. Because she had cried out, it was

not a sneak attack, and Ainz casually avoided it.

The arrows flew past him, having missed their mark.

To begin with, arrows were not effective on skeleton-type monsters like Ainz.

She had hoped that he would not bother with evading them and casually take the

hits, but it seemed that was not going to happen. The arrows she had loosed had

flattened heads, like a spade; they were specially designed magic arrows which

would do bludgeoning damage. If they had not been avoided, they should have

been able to effectively damage even skeletal opponents.

At least, that was how it was supposed to happen, but even if that was not the

case, there was nothing to regret. Hekkeran took the opportunity to stand up

and slightly widen the gap between himself and Ainz. Imina’s cry had also been

to give Hekkeran the chance to rise to his feet.

“[Twin Blade Strike]!”

“Hah!”

The two slashes were easily deflected by the single sword. The shock of the

parry sent tremors through Hekkeran’s hands.

*What a troublesome guy, is this what happens when you give warrior training to a*

*monster with superhuman abilities? Just how strong is he?*

The price of repeatedly using his certain-kill moves was the rapid draining of

mental stamina. His brain felt like it was screaming from his exertions, so

Hekkeran decided to back away.

Of course, Ainz would not permit that.

“As if I would let you escape!”

Ainz charged. That was only to be expected—backpedaling was slower than

forward motion.

Just as he was about to catch up to Hekkeran, something whistled through the

air as it flew past the side of his face.

A high-speed arrow came from behind Hekkeran’s back — hidden by his body.

A normal person would not have been able to avoid it. However, against Ainz

with his superhuman reflexes, it was still not enough.

“—[Flash]!”

“[Lesser Strength]!”

A brilliant flare of light burst in front of Ainz. Whether he resisted it or not,

the spell would blind him for a moment, but it seemed pointless against Ainz.

All it did was annoy him.

“Interfering busybodies!”

Ainz clicked his nonexistent tongue at Hekkeran, who had closed the gap

thanks to his augmented strength and dexterity.

“—[Reinforce Armor]!”

“[Anti-Evil Protection]!”

Arche and Roberdyck’s support spells had solidified Hekkeran’s defense.

Having evaded Hekkeran’s attack and deflected his swords, Ainz was about to

riposte once more when another arrow flew into his face.

“…Hmph!”

The casual ease with which Ainz evaded the arrow by simply turning his face

was befitting of the ruler of the tomb, and of a monstrous warrior.

Hekkeran used the brief opening made by the support fire to back away, and

sweat coursed down his body from the brief but intense combat.

He already knew this, but Ainz Ooal Gown was very strong.

Human beings could not hope to match his physical abilities. Worse still, he

had the technique to make full use of his superhuman strength and speed. His

observational skills could see through feints. He had the measure of every

member of Foresight. Combined with his resistance to magic and the enchanted

sword and shield he bore; he was everything a warrior wanted to be.

But there was a reason they could stand toe-to-toe with a man like this.

To be fair, he had been hard-pressed to hold his ground. If he had misread the

angle of the falling sword and failed to parry, his swords would have been ruined

and he would probably have suffered a fatal wound. A small mistake in

estimating the speed of the black sword would have resulted in him being sliced

neatly in half. The fact that all his coin tosses had come up heads was nothing

short of luck.

Yet, there was an even more important reason beyond this.

That reason was teamwork.

It was precisely because they had walked the edge of life and death together,

and were intimately aware of what each of the others was thinking, that they

could move and act like a single organism.

This was how the united group Foresight could stand against the mightiest

individual, Ainz Ooal Gown.

A faint smile lifted the corner of Hekkeran’s mouth.

Until now, Ainz had been untouched. Certainly, he was very strong. But he

was not invincible.

With this conviction in his heart, he swung his twin swords.

Hekkeran’s sword strike, the fastest his augmented body could produce, was

deflected by the round black shield. The arrow flying in was interdicted by the

black sword. Arche and Roberdyck made use of this opening to enhance

Hekkeran even further.

Ever since Ainz had clicked his tongue, his hostility toward them had been

rapidly weakening.

After considering whether or not to press the attack, Hekkeran decided to

back down and calm his frenzied breathing. The undead Ainz would not get tired

no matter how long or how hard he fought, but humans like Hekkeran and the

others would become exhausted. Dragging the battle out was a bad idea. He had

to rest whenever he got the chance.

“So… as I thought, I still couldn’t deal a decisive blow. I thought I had the

advantage in strength, skills and knowing what you could do, but when I’m

actually engaged in battle, I’m still having difficulty… For instance, why haven’t

I taken any of you down yet?”

Ainz shrugged his shoulders in annoyance. Hekkeran, who was watching from

opposite Ainz, did not feel particularly irritated by his patronizing tone.

Truthfully speaking, this was the power of teamwork. Hekkeran smiled as

though he had been praised.

In the midst of all this, the beauty who had been silent up till now finally

spoke.

“—Ainz-sama. Perhaps you should end this charade here?”

“What?”

“Forgive my rudeness, but I find it hard to believe that you would permit

continued freedom to these base knaves, these thieves who dared use the name

of the Supreme Beings to deceive you. Perhaps it is time for the mercy you have

granted them to come to an end?”

“Hey, Albedo. If you talk to Ainz-sama like that—”

“—No, Aura. That is a good point.”

Ainz shook his head.

“And that is enough. I have gained sufficient experience from this battle.”

“Truly marvelous. I expected nothing less of the Supreme One who rules me.”

“Hah, is that so. Well, this is certainly cause for celebration. Although I know

you’re humoring me, praise from a warrior whose skills far exceed my own is

still pleasing to me.”

“I would not dream of deceiving you with false praise. Those words came from

the bottom of my heart.”

“Is that so? Then thank you. Cocytus can evaluate me later, and I still need to

hear your opinions on future training sessions like this.”

Ainz nodded several times, looking very satisfied with himself, and then he

turned back to Foresight.

The air between them had changed, and Hekkeran had a bad feeling about it.

His instincts that had carried him through many life-and-death situations

were screaming to him: *there is great danger here.*

“Now then, that’s all for playing around with swords. It is time for a different

sort of entertainment.”

Ainz cast aside the sword and shield he was holding, and they vanished before

they hit the ground.

“What?!”

Discarding one’s arms was the universal sign of giving up the fight. However,

Ainz’s attitude did not betray even the slightest hint of defeat, that he was in a

situation where he was going to surrender.

This was not a gesture of capitulation.

Unable to figure out what Ainz was thinking, Hekkeran was filled with

confusion.

“…What?”

At this, Ainz smiled. Or rather, he seemed to smile.

He slowly spread his arms. It was an action that resembled an angel reaching

out to the faithful, or a mother welcoming her child into her embrace; a loving

acceptance of what lay before him.

“You don’t get it? Then let me put it in terms you might be able to

understand,” Ainz laughed. “I’ll play with you, so give me your best shot,

humans.”

The mood had changed—

He had forsaken his weapon and his shield. That should have meant he had

been weakened. But Hekkeran had the feeling that the Ainz before him now was

more powerful than before. Indeed, it seemed as though his body had physically

grown in size before their eyes, so oppressive was his presence.

A being that grew stronger when abandoning the sword.

When one thought about it, only two answers remained. One would be that

he was one of those warrior monks who honed their bodies into living weapons.

But if that were the case, his fighting style from earlier—the way he evaded

attacks—did not seem polished enough for him to be one of their number.

Then, the alternative—

“—He’s a magic caster!?”

That cry came from Arche, who had reached the same conclusion Hekkeran

had.

That was it. This was the question at hand. The being before them, Ainz Ooal

Gown—was he a magic caster?

It was understandable that they had not considered that earlier. Who could

have imagined that any magic caster could have fought on even terms with

Hekkeran, the party’s strongest fighter and a veteran warrior?

Magic casters—especially arcane magic casters—had weaker bodies than

warriors. After all, if one had time to train one’s body, one could easily spend

that time on learning magic. As such, magic casters who could fight on par with

warriors were nonexistent.

That was simple common sense.

Yet there were beings who could turn that wisdom on its head. Who could

have imagined such a being would be standing in front of them?

For that reason, Arche’s voice carried the hope that it was untrue, and the

desire that her hypothesis would be rejected. Because if it were true, that would

mean that Ainz was far more confident in his skills as a magic caster than he was

as a warrior. What that meant, nobody needed to say out loud.

Even casting a few spells could greatly improve battle performance. As

Hekkeran had been demonstrating, several enhancement spells made a dramatic

difference. But if that was the case—

“Did you finally realize it? How foolish you lot are. Well, it’s only natural to

expect this level of intelligence from you miserable vermin, who track your filth

into my — no, my friends’ Nazarick.”

However, as long as Arche was around, Hekkeran and the others could deny

it.

“Arche! Is this guy a magic caster?!”

“No! I’m sure of it! At least, he’s not an arcane magic caster!”

“Hm? And what is that supposed to mean?”

“—I can’t sense any magical power from your body.”

“Ahhh. So you were using divination magic, then. How rude.”

Ainz showed Hekkeran and the others his hands. As one might expect of an

undead, there was nothing of them but bones. He spread his fingers to show that

each of them, on both hands, was wearing a ring.

“Once I remove this ring, you will understand. I also lent it to my

subordinates.”

Saying that, Ainz removed a ring on his right hand. And then—

“Ugeeeehhhh!”

It was the sound of vomiting. Sticky fluid splattered onto the floor of the

arena, and a sour, rancid stench wafted up around Foresight.

“What did you do?!”

Imina glared at Ainz, from where she had rushed over to assist Arche. Ainz

seemed a little uncomfortable, but still answered in a displeased tone.

“What on earth is that girl doing? There’s a limit to how rude you can be,

throwing up when you see someone’s face.”

“—E-everyone, run!”

Arche was shouting, and tears were leaking from the corner of her eyes.

“This guy is a mon— ueeehhhh!”

Unable to endure it, Arche threw up again. In that moment, Hekkeran

understood why she had vomited.

Ainz had done nothing to her. Rather, she had been unable to withstand the

combination of terror and stress caused by seeing the enormous magical power

surrounding Ainz, and so she had vomited.

And that meant—

“—We can’t beat him! His strength is on a totally different level! Even the

word monster can’t describe him!”

Arche began wailing as the tears rolled down her cheeks.

“No way no way no way—”

Imina tightly hugged Arche to her chest. The girl was violently shaking her

head as though she had gone mad.

“Calm down! Roberdyck!”

“Got it! [Lion’s Heart]!”

Under the influence of Roberdyck’s magic, Arche managed to recover from

the panic which had gripped her. Like a newborn deer, she rose unsteadily on

shaky legs, using her staff as a crutch.

“—Everyone, we have to flee now! That’s not a being humans can beat! It’s an

unbelievable monster!”

“…Understood, Arche!”

“Yeah, I get it. When he removed the ring, the entire world seemed to change.

I felt it raise goosebumps all over me.”

“Yes. Powerful wouldn’t nearly be enough to describe this monster.”

The alertness level of the three of them had gone through the roof. They

stared at Ainz with nerves wound even tighter than before. Theirs was an

expression that understood that even an instant’s loss of watchfulness would

spell their deaths.

“It looks like they won’t let us run.”

“The moment we show them our backs, we die. Although I have the feeling

that just averting our eyes would be enough.”

“We need to buy time or we won’t make it.”

“…Not coming?”

Of course, Hekkeran would not be baited by Ainz, who was lazily scratching

his skull with one long finger. The enemy’s fighting power vastly exceeded that

of any being which had ever existed. That meant they could only count on one

thing.

That was the instant when Ainz began casting a spell — a magic caster was

most vulnerable when reciting an incantation. If he could cast a spell without

incanting it, then it was over for them, but even so, that was a tiny possibility

which existed for them.

As though drawing a bow taut, Hekkeran gathered his strength within himself.

“Then I will go. [Touch of Undeath].”

“What kind of magic is it? Arche!”

“I don’t know! I’ve never heard of it before!”

The black fog which covered Ainz’s right hand was an unknown magic which

put them all on their guard. Hekkeran tensed his legs, ready to dodge at any time.

His companions behind him were also wary for an area-of-effect attack, and

began spacing themselves out.

Suddenly, Ainz began walking towards them.

Hekkeran’s eyes went wide. He had openings all over his amateurish advance.

These were not the movements of a skilled warrior. Hekkeran knew Ainz was

trying to bait them into a trap, but he could not read Ainz’s intentions.

*Is he trying to use magic for something… or was that spell a close-range type? Or*

*was it a defensive type?*

Hekkeran was familiar with the more famous spells, but Hekkeran was not a

mage by profession, and he could not understand Ainz’s intentions.

“Stay away!”

Imina’s angry cry pierced the air, as did the arrows she launched at Ainz.

Using a special technique, she had launched three arrows at once, but Ainz

deftly knocked them from the sky with a bony hand.

“…You’re in the way.”

It was a small but cold voice.

The red blaze in the empty eye sockets flickered, but it was only Hekkeran,

who was up front studying Ainz’s every move, who noticed it.

Just as the bad feeling struck, Ainz’s form vanished.

Hekkeran turned, trusting his instincts. In his eyes, he saw his companions’

shocked faces. However, there was no time to explain. Especially to Imina. Ainz

was standing behind Imina, slowly reaching his right hand out to her.

*Imina! She didn’t notice! I need to shout — no, useless things like that won’t help!*

As he used a martial art to move at top speed toward Imina, a twinge of

confusion ran through Hekkeran.

Was it wise to protect Imina?

Compared to Arche and Roberdyck, who could use support spells to enhance

people, Imina’s usefulness and importance were relatively low. The best way to

increase their survival rate was to discard the stumbling blocks at their feet.

However—

*Dammit!*

This was the wrong thing for a leader to do. Even though this was almost

equivalent to betraying his comrades, Hekkeran did not slow his steps at all.

Emotion overruled reason in this matter.

He wanted to save Imina. That was all.

Suddenly, an image of Imina lying on his bed appeared in his mind’s eye. He

smiled bitterly to himself, because in a life-and-death situation, all he could

think about was her curveless body.

Even so — he put even more power into his feet.

This was the strength of a man who wanted to protect his woman.

“Get away!”

Hekkeran’s sudden charge created confusion, and thus he made it in time.

Before Ainz could touch her, he had already knocked Imina out of the way.

Ainz was deciding which should be his priority — reducing their pain, the

small whimpering voice in his head was saying — the man who had appeared in

front of him, or the woman who got away.

“Hey! It’s me, dumbass!”

He followed up his yell with a martial art.

First, he used [Limit Breaker]. There would be a price to pay, but it increased

the amount of martial arts he could use at the same time. Next was the technique

which made his body feel like something was being broken inside it, [Dull Pain].

After that was [Physical Boost] and a [Twin Blade Strike] made under the

influence of [Iron Fist].

His greatest attack was born from these.

His twin swords glowed.

Hekkeran was counting on the fact that Ainz would be used to his sword

attacks from their earlier exchange, so the sudden change in speed would

confuse his senses and make it harder to evade. It was the foreshadowing of a

strike which would end the battle in a single blow.

Ainz did not react to it.

*I’ve killed him!*

Just as he imagined his swords slicing into the defenseless skull, the sensation

which traveled up his hands was definitely not the feeling of steel cutting into

bone.

*He’s immune to slashing damage?*

He had had similar experiences during his adventures as a worker.

*He’s immune to both slashing and piercing attacks? What kind of monster is he?!*

As Hekkeran tried to retreat in a panic, he felt an icy-cold sensation

enveloping his forehead. It was Ainz’s hand. Hekkeran felt like he had been

clamped in a vise, wanting to escape yet unable to move.

“Hekkeran!”

“Imina! He’s immune to slashing!”

Hekkeran tried to shrug off the intense pain and report what he had learned

to his colleagues. While he was grasped by the head, he felt his entire body being

lifted up. Although he hammered the backs of his swords into Ainz’s arm, the

grip on his head showed no signs of loosening.

“Wrong. Piercing, slashing or bludgeoning — none of the weak attacks you

can muster can do so much as put a scratch on me.”

“…That… what? The hell, what kind of con game are you running? That’s not

fair!”

“He’s lying! Imina, if that were true, there would be no reason to fight at all.

He must have some kind of weakness!”

“—I won’t fall for it!”

“It’s truly sad when you can’t even believe the truth that’s right in front of

you. I would have imagined that you would have realized from the melee battle,

and the conversation we had, that you were nothing more than useful test

subjects. Did that little skirmish we had give you the hope that you could actually

win here? Consider that wishful little dream to be my mercy to you in the hell

that is to come.”

“What kind of mercy is that? You piece of shit, you goddamn bastard, let

Hekkeran go!”

The arrow arrived at the same time as her voice. However, Ainz simply

remained still, and the pain in Hekkeran’s forehead continued unabated.

“Do you really want to do that? You might hit this man.”

The pain in his forehead filled Hekkeran with fear, the fear that at any

moment his head might be crushed by the hand holding it. Although he

struggled, Ainz did not shift a millimeter. It was like attacking a steel block —

the only thing Hekkeran hurt was himself.

“Did that hurt? Don’t worry. I won’t kill you just like that. A miserable little

thief like you does not deserve that mercy — instead, [Paralysis].”

His body was frozen. No, it was not frozen, it had been paralyzed.

“Hmm, if I all I did was inflict paralysis, then maybe [Touch of Undeath] was

a little wasteful.”

Hekkeran heard the words, but he did not understand them.

Imina’s bowstring hissed as she sent a continuous stream of projectiles

downrange, but the only response was quiet laughter.

“So, how far can you… no, please, struggle as much as you want. That will only

deepen your despair.”

*Run away.*

Hekkeran’s mouth would not move to make the sounds he wanted.

This was an opponent they could not simply evade just by running away. But

fighting would be even more foolish. This was especially true given that once the

vanguard was taken down, the battle line would collapse.

“Then, who will be next? Of course, you can all come at once, but that would

be too boring, no?”

# 

●

# 

Imina turned to look at Hekkeran, who was lying on the floor of the coliseum.

He was not dead. But he looked like it. There was no way she could save him

from the clutches of the logic-defying monster known as Ainz Ooal Gown. But

even so—

“—You idiot! Just by common sense, you should have abandoned me! You

dummy!”

She was angry.

“Idiot, idiot, idiot, stupid idiot! You moron!”

“…Directing abuse to a man who so gallantly risked himself to protect his

comrades is only going to upset me, you know.”

It was a statement that showed a complete lack of understanding for Imina’s

feelings. Then again, their opponent was a monster; trying to make him

understand human emotions would be impossible.

“I already know that! I don’t deserve such a great leader!”

She took a breath.

“But still! You’re still an idiot! Running on your emotions like that!”

“…What?”

*Don’t be confused…*

Imina thought to herself. She was trying to suppress the feelings of a woman

who wanted to save her man.

She had to abandon Hekkeran and bring this information back. She had to tell

the outside world about these ruins, about the fearsome monster which

inhabited it, and depending on how things went, they might even need to

assemble a punitive force to deal with it.

*—Demon Gods…*

Two hundred years ago, the Demon King that laid waste to the continent must

have been a creature like this.

It felt as though the world she was living in had been touched by myths and

legends. It clearly could not be like this, but some part of her, deep in her heart,

was insisting that this was just a dream.

*Legends, huh? It sounds so bizarre when you put it that way. It’s heroes that ought*

*to be fighting a monster like this—*

Inspiration struck in a flash.

That was it. The ones who battled the demon gods were the Thirteen Heroes

— they were heroes. Then, the only one who could fight Ainz was also a hero.

“Give Hekkeran back! If we don’t return by the stipulated time, the strongest

people in the world will force their way into this tomb! If we can return

unharmed, you can use us to negotiate!”

“What is this, lies again?

Ainz sighed, a silent “haah” sound. Sweat beaded on Imina’s brow. it was

genuine.

“No, I’m not lying.”

“—Albedo. Is there anyone who could be considered strong on the surface?”

“There are none, I believe she is just spouting meaningless lies.”

“It’s not a lie!”

The girl behind Imina was shouting.

“The adamantite-ranked adventurer Momon from ‘Darkness’ is there! He’s

the greatest warrior of them all! He’s stronger than you!”

For the first time, Albedo appeared perturbed. She looked to Ainz, panic

written on her face, and lowered her head to him.

“M-my apologies! There is such a being! P-please, forgive me!”

“Mmm… ah, yes, I didn’t even notice, Albedo. Momon of ‘Darkness,’ hmm. By

the way, he’s… forget it, it’s not important. He cannot defeat me.”

He had been acting like a demon king until now, but the way he was slumping

his shoulders suggested that he was hiding something. Exactly what he was

hiding, nobody could tell.

“Momon is strong! Stronger than you!”

“…No, those are hardly grounds for negotiation, Give it up.”

Ainz waved his hand lazily to dismiss the topic.

“Now then, shall we begin?”

The time for idle chatter was over.

“Arche! Run!”

Roberdyck shouted, and Imina agreed.

“Yes, run!”

“Look up! This is probably the outside! If you fly, there’s a chance you can

escape! Run, even if it’s only you! We’ll try to buy you some time, a minute, no,

ten seconds!”

“Now that is an interesting idea. Aura, open the exit. I will humor them.”

“Understood!”

Ainz pointed at the direction Roberdyck and the others had entered from.

Aura leapt up, the bottoms of her shoes glowed, and her body disappeared.

“Now then, Aura has gone to open the gate. Go ahead and flee. Abandon your

comrades. Who was the one who wanted to run again?”

Ainz extended his hand. His skeletal face could not display any expressions,

but from his gesture, it was clear enough. If he had flesh, it would have been

twisted into an evil smile. It would have been a smile that eagerly anticipated

these comrades to fall into infighting.

It was true that Workers were different from adventurers; they formed parties

based on the power of money and useful relationships, and in a situation like

this, the odds of them fleeing would be quite high. However, Foresight was

different.

“Arche, run now!”

“Yes, run,” Imina smiled. “You still have your sisters, right? Then leave us and

go. That’s what you should be doing!”

“How could I? This is obviously all my fault!”

Seeing that Ainz had no intent to press the attack right away, Roberdyck

walked over to Arche, and then withdrew a small leather pouch from somewhere

close to his heart for her to hold on to.

“It’ll be fine. We’ll beat that monster Ainz and then come right after you.”

“That’s right. When that happens, you’re buying the drinks.”

Imina also drew forth a small pouch for her to hold.

“Then, go. Use the money I left at the inn as you wish.”

“Mine too.”

“…I’ll hold you to that. Then, I’ll be going first.”

Of course, none of the three actually believed it.

Defeating the being called Ainz, whose power was far beyond their imagining,

was something they could not even hope to do. Arche knew that this was their

final farewell, and she was choking back her tears as she cast her spell.

“There are monsters in the sky that might still catch you even if you run…”

“—[Fly]!”

Ignoring Ainz’s warning, Arche’s spell took effect. She looked to her comrades

one last time, and then took to the air without another word.

“…Ah, is that how it is. Well, it’s faster and less tiring than running,” Ainz said

in a casual way. “However, it’s quite remarkable that you decided it without

fighting with each other. I thought I would see your disgusting true selves on

display here.”

“You would never understand. It’s because we’re comrades.”

“That’s true. Dying to protect a comrade is not a bad thing—”

A flash of insight struck Imina.

“—Were your comrades the friends you spoke of?”

“Muuu!”

“Your comrades must have been exceptional individuals, no? Then, our

relationship is as close as theirs, and yours.”

“That’s right.”

The evil atmosphere vanished as though it had never been, and Ainz

continued in a quiet tone.

“Greater love hath no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends —

so it was written in the Gospel of Marco.”[4]

“…It’s all right if we die. However, for the sake of the bond that we share, that

1. 4. Ainz doesn’t quite get it right. This verse is from John 15:13, not ‘Marco.’

you yourself, and your exceptional comrades shared, please let her go.”

“Mm…”

Ainz hesitated for several seconds, and then shook his head.

“There will be no mercy for thieves like you. All that awaits you is suffering

upon suffering upon suffering, followed by death. But for the sake of the lives

that you are willing to throw away for your comrade, I will make an exception

for that girl. Shalltear.”

Ainz carelessly showed his back to them, and called out to the VIP box. There

was no chance he would be hurt, and it showed in his attitude.

No, that was the reality of it. There was no attack they could use which would

work. This was mere fantasy after understanding the truth of things. The two of

them had no method which could wound the monster called Ainz. Because of

this, they could calmly turn their heads back. At the very least, they had to buy

Arche the time to flee.

Although they had no cards to play, they still had to do it. Imina and

Roberdyck exchanged looks, and nodded.

On the other hand, a girl’s voice came from the VIP box in response to Ainz’s

voice.

She was a human girl with hair that gleamed like platinum. Although the two

of them were filled with anger, they could not help but be captivated by that

beauty, their eyes drawn to the girl who possessed it.

Suddenly. the beautiful girl shifted her line of sight to look at the two of them.

Her eyes were an entrancing crimson. Imina felt as though they were squeezing

her heart. Similarly for Roberdyck, he was having trouble breathing with the

crushing pressure on his chest.

Even after the girl’s eyes left them, Imina and Roberdyck still felt a little

hampered.

“Shalltear, teach that child the meaning of terror. Teach her the gulf between

the sliver of hope for escape that she clings to, and the inescapable reality that

awaits all who dare invade the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick. After that,

do not cause her any pain, but slay her with the deepest and sincerest mercy.”

“Understood, Ainz-sama.”

The girl — Shalltear — smiled to Ainz. However, when Imina saw that smile

from the side, a chill ran down her spine. Her instinct told her that this was a

monster draped in a very beautiful skin.

“Do enjoy the hunt.”

“That was my intention.”

Shalltear bowed deeply to Ainz before setting forth. Every step she took was

one closer to ending Arche’s life, but even if Imina knew it in her mind, there

was nothing they could do about it. Imina and Roberdyck were both unable to

move.

Shalltear walked past them without any sign that she had noticed them,

without paying them the slightest bit of attention. Perhaps Foresight could close

the distance between themselves and Shalltear immediately if they ran after her,

but she seemed so far away.

“What’s this? Still not coming? If you have time to talk, you have time to

fight… How unexpectedly honorable of you.”

He was not looking down on her. His sentiment was genuine. In response to

it, Imina’s fighting spirit recovered somewhat.

“Wait! A question, please! What happened there, where is the mercy in that?”

“A priest… then, I will tell you. In Nazarick, a death without further suffering

is mercy enough.”

Silence descended upon them. They would no longer speak with words, but

weapons.

“Let’s go, Rober!”

“Yes! Ohhhhhhh!”

With an uncharacteristic battle cry, the charging Roberdyck brought his mace

down on Ainz’s face. It was a strike made with all his strength. It was precisely

because he thought that Ainz would not evade it that he put all his might into

the blow.

Although Ainz took the full-power strike in the face, he did not react with pain

as expected. Roberdyck followed up his attack, reaching out with his bare hand.

“[Middle Cure Wounds]!”

The healing spell was targeted at Ainz. When exposed to healing-type magic,

undead would take damage instead. However, like the attack spell Arche cast

earlier, it vanished uselessly against an invisible wall.

“Ahhhhh!”

Imina tensed her bowstring as she cried out. Then — she loosed. Although

Roberdyck was next to Ainz, she was not nearly bad enough to actually hit him.

Rather, at this range, there was no way she could miss.

Yet — the arrows struck Ainz, and fell to the ground without doing any

damage whatsoever.

Ainz vanished.

It was the same tactic as earlier.

“Teleportation!”

“Not quite.”

As expected, the voice came from behind.

“I—”

Before Roberdyck could finish, Ainz’s hand gently settled on Imina’s shoulder.

There was no hostility in that gesture.

However, it had a telling effect. All the strength in her body vanished, and she

slumped to the ground. Although her mind was fully functional and conscious,

her body felt like a puddle of immobile, insensate slime.

“What did you do to her?”

Roberdyck asked his question in a trembling voice, as his eyes went from the

collapsed Imina to Ainz, who stood by her side.

“Was that a surprise? It’s nothing special.”

Ainz proceeded to explain in such a way as to break Roberdyck’s spirit.

“It was almost the same as just now. After casting a silent [Time Stop] I moved

over here and cast the same spell I used on that man, [Touch of Undeath]. And

then, I just touched her.”

The air between them froze into silence. The sound of Roberdyck swallowing

was exceptionally loud in comparison,

“…You stopped time…”

“Oh yes. Anti-[Time Stop] countermeasures are very important, don’t you

know? You’ll need to have them by the time you hit level 70. Oh well, you’re

going to die here, so in your case, it’s largely academic.”

Roberdyck ground his teeth.

*He was lying.* If only he could say that. If only he could deny everything this

monster — this *god* — was saying. It would be better if he fell to his knees and

clutched his ears to shut the words out.

He understood that Ainz was very powerful.

However, even with that considered, stopping time and the like was

something that should not exist in this world.

The march of time was a flow that could not be mastered or controlled by

humanity. What could he do against a foe who was capable of such a feat?

Cutting down an entire forest with a single sword would be an easier goal in

comparison.

Ainz Ooal Gown. He was a being that the human race could never defeat. He

was a man who stood in the realm of divinity.

He gripped his mace in both hands—

—and he felt a light tap on his shoulder.

“Ah…”

Roberdyck’s body stopped moving. He did not have to look to know who had

done it. It was Ainz Ooal Gown — that godlike being who could control the

passage of time — who was supposed to be standing in front of him. When had

he vanished from his field of vision?

The cold flowing into him made him feel as though he had turned into an ice

sculpture. Thus, any feeling and freedom were stripped from his body.

“—It was useless, wasn’t it?”

So spoke the gentle voice which carried no trace of enmity to Roberdyck. The

mace fell from nerveless fingers, to the ground—

Then, Ainz muttered as he looked to Roberdyck who had lost all will to fight.

“Well, that was a waste of effort. I think I might have actually broken a sweat.”

—It was completely useless. Every tactic and trick he had tried could not do

even the slightest bit of damage to Ainz. Thoroughly defeated, Roberdyck looked

quietly at Ainz, and calmly asked him a question:

“I have something to ask. What is to become of me afterwards?”

“Mm? Is it because you’re a divine magic caster and you think you won’t end

up in the same state as those other two?”

With that as a premise, Ainz began his explanation.

“Well, let’s start with those two. Aura, take them to the Large Cave.

Gashokukochuuou says he’s running out of nests.”

The Dark Elf’s ears twitched, and her eyes went wide.

“Ai-Ainz-sama! Mare! I can order Mare to go instead, right? Make him go there

instead!”

“Oh, hm. Fine with me.”

“Understood! I’ll let Mare go instead!”

“As for that, I apologize. There will be no kind fate in store for them. As for

you — the subordinate I sent in pursuit is also a divine magic caster, but the god

she believes in is completely different from the gods you worship. When it

comes down to it, I have no idea what the Four Great Gods you worship are. As

such, I need to confirm the details on them. As their subordinates, you have

names for them, but whether they’re the Four Gods or the Six Gods, these names

are little more than job titles, like the Fire God, Earth God, is that it?”

“I, I don’t know about that.”

“I see… so they’re not superior beings who possess a mysterious power,

they’re nothing more than great men of the past who’ve been deified—”

“—Impossible!”

“Well, do listen. That’s just my theory. But if that were the case, if you do

borrow the power of the gods to work your magic, could dead people provide it

to you? Or rather, what are the gods? Do they even exist? Are you really using

the power of the gods?”

“…What are you trying to say?”

“…Have you ever *seen* the gods?”

“The gods are always by my side!”

“That is to say, you’ve never actually seen them directly, then?”

“No! When we use our spells, we feel the presence of a mighty being. That is

our god!”

“…And who declared that that presence to be a god? The god himself? Or

someone else drawing on that power?”

Roberdyck recalled the theological debates he had taken part in. There was no

clear answer to Ainz’s questions. Until today, the priests still debated hotly over

whether that was the proof of the gods’ existence.

Just as Roberdyck was about to speak, Ainz interrupted him.

“…Well, supposing these super-dimensional beings — which we shall

generously term gods for our purposes — do exist, I wonder if that means they

were originally colorless entities. Simply put, they are masses of power. Because

drawing on their power dyes them in a different color and changes the thing…

well, they do exist in a world with magical laws, I just wanted someone to chat

with someone about this. It wouldn’t be funny if there really were gods.”

“……”

“My apologies. That was off topic. The power of the god you believe in. I think

we won’t be able to learn it… so do you want to take part in a human

experiment?”

“…A human experiment?”

“That’s right. For instance, when we alter your memories so the god you

believe in is someone else, what will happen after that?”

*He’s insane.* That was Roberdyck’s deepest and most honest thought about the

situation.

*No, he’s undead. It wouldn’t be strange no matter what he did.*

Ainz took a step back, looking with deep interest at Roberdyck. That look was

the way a scholar would examine a laboratory animal, and it made Roberdyck

want to throw up.

“Why, why do you want to do that?”

“To prove that god exists… eh, I’m not going to bother going on with that joke.

Truthfully, I want to become stronger by understanding the nature of that

power. And if those beings you call gods really exist, I want to know if they have

emotions or thoughts. I want to confirm that. As for me, I have never thought of

myself as a chosen being. In truth, there are many others like that.”

Roberdyck had no idea what Ainz was talking about.

“Therefore, expanding military preparations is essential. Of course, it may be

that no enemies exist, or if they do exist, none of them are as strong as we are.

However, don’t you think that the leader of an organization shouldn’t be

negligent? After all, if we rest on our laurels, we’re likely to have our feet cut out

from under us when we least expect it. Confirming the existence of gods is part

of that.”

Ainz shrugged as he finished speaking.

# *2*

# 

# 

# 

Arche panted heavily.

Her body trembled every time the grass rustled in the wind. Like a small

animal, she looked fearfully in every direction.

She was surrounded by forest, and there were few places here where the light

could reach. The spreading canopies of the densely packed vegetation blocked

out any illumination from the sky, and so there was almost none on the surface.

Although this environment would normally be difficult for a human being to

navigate, in lieu of illumination, Arche used the [Dark Vision] spell, which made

her surroundings seem as bright as day.

However, even with this spell, she still needed a lot of concentration to pick

out grass patches which people could be hiding in, tree trunks that might conceal

enemies behind them, and listen to the branches creaking as they swayed in the

wind.

As an arcane magic caster, Arche could not count on her own physical strength

to shake off any monsters if they leaped onto her and pinned her down.

Normally, she would have help from her friends, but now there was nobody to

support her, nobody to cover her, and nobody to heal her.

In other words, all she could do was remain alert for foes who were trying to

advance into close quarters, keep her distance, and flee. She was on edge because

she was keenly aware of this fact, and it sapped her mental strength even more

than normal.

Her original plan was to use a [Fly] spell to make her getaway, since she was

outside. But once she flew above the trees, she saw a huge black shape in the sky

which seemed to be searching for something, so she abandoned that plan.

Once she detected the presence of the giant bat, she could not find it in herself

to try and turn it into a contest of speed. That was because even though

[Invisibility] could fool visual senses, it could not deceive the special sensory

organs of a bat.

After verifying that her surroundings were safe, Arche took flight once more,

at a snail’s pace.

She was proceeding as slowly as possible with her [Fly] spell because she

wanted to observe her surroundings. If she went at full speed, she would not be

able to react quickly enough even if she were on alert and spotted a threat, and

that would mean she would be leaping into the mouth of any monsters which

pursued her. In order to avoid this, she deliberately lowered her speed.

Finally, Arche felt the layer of magic energy surrounding her growing thin.

Her [Fly] spell’s duration was about to run out.

She slowly descended to the ground.

The question now was what should she do. Casting [Fly] again would not be

a problem. She could feel that she had enough mana for it. However, [Dark

Vision] was also a crucial spell, and she also had to reserve enough mana for

defensive spells in case of combat.

The third-tier spell [Fly] was one of the highest-ranked spells Arche knew how

to use. This also meant that it was one of the most draining spells she had. If

possible, she wanted to avoid using it.

Ignoring the present circumstances, even she did not know how long it would

take to get out of this forest without the use of spells that would stave off her

fatigue. And without the ability to fly, she could not even confirm her current

location.

On the way here, Arche had occasionally risen above the forest canopy and

used the big tree beside the coliseum as a landmark. When she used [Fly] to

travel, she lost her sense of direction. If she stayed in the forest, she could not

spot the big tree, and she was not able to climb trees either.

“—Where can I rest…” Arche mumbled to herself.

Certainly, if she restored her mana through sleep, she could use [Fly] more

often, and movement under the sun would be safer. This was particularly true

for the forest, where the monsters tended to be nocturnal.

It might be better for her to curl up somewhere and wait for daybreak, rather

than force herself to carry on in the dark forest.

However, Arche had no idea where the safe places were.

If Imina were here, she would probably know. And if Roberdyck or Hekkeran

were around, she could rest easy even in dangerous areas. However, her reliable

companions were not with her.

“—Imina, Roberdyck…”

Arche curled up beside a huge tree, and thought of her comrades.

“—Liars.”

There had been no word from them after so long.

As expected, they had not been able to escape.

No, that was something she had known from the beginning. There was no way

they could beat the ridiculous entity known as Ainz. Even so, was she a fool for

holding on to the faint hope of seeing them again?

Arche sat on the ground, leaned her back on the great tree, and closed her

eyes. She knew it was dangerous.

Still, she wanted to close her eyes.

As the memory of the three of them came to mind, she squeezed her eyelids

shut.

The icy-cool sensation of the bark against her head was very comfortable. It

was only after she had rested for a while that she realized just how tired she had

been. Her stress turned into emotional exhaustion, and it rose without stopping.

“—Haaaaa…”

She let her head rest against the tree.

And then she opened her eyes wide.

[Dark Vision] painted the world of night in fresh, bright colors, but she had

no explanation for what she saw in her field of vision.

Someone was watching Arche.

It was like nothing Arche had ever seen before, and her eyes seemed transfixed

on the sight of the beautiful girl.

She was dressed in a velvet-soft ball gown dyed in the darkest shade of black,

a garment that seemed thoroughly unsuited for her present environment. Her

skin was as pale as wax. A single hand stroked her long, platinum hair, which

seemed about to brush across Arche’s face.

Though she was a noble daughter, Arche had never seen a girl this beautiful

before. If she were to show up at a formal dance, men would flock to her like

moths to a flame, purely out of desire for her beauty. Her crimson pupils

radiated an irresistible charm that seemed to draw Arche’s soul into them.

But Arche immediately returned to her senses. There was no way someone

like that would be in a place like this. Especially not someone with both feet on

the tree trunk, standing parallel to the ground in utter defiance of gravity.

It was obvious that this was a pursuer sent by Ainz. Still, it was not completely

impossible that she might have been a resident in the forest for a long time.

“Tag. You’re it.”

Her fleeting hopes had been utterly dashed.

“—A pursuer.”

Arche leapt away to open up a gap, pointing her staff at the girl. The girl

seemed disinterested in Arche, and neatly walked down the tree trunk and onto

the floor.

“Come now, start running.”

“—If I defeat you here, I can flee more safely.”

Even as she said this, Arche smiled bitterly in her heart. There was no way she

could beat any pursuer sent by Ainz, a being who existed outside the bounds of

common sense.

Knowing this, the reason why she said so was to gauge the other party’s

reaction.

“Then, by all means, although I can only play with you for a while.”

Her attitude said that she completely understood the difference in power

between the two of them. Which was to say, if she fought Arche, it would be

nothing more than toying with her.

“—[Fly]!”

Arche cast her spell and began to flee. There was not the leisurely, slow flight

she had demonstrated on the ground. In one swift movement she was aloft,

covering her face with her arms as she broke through the forest canopy and

soared into the air.

Under the night sky, Arche looked around once more. She was on guard for

the bat-like monster she had seen earlier. However, it seemed that it was

nowhere around. And so, all that was left was to escape.

“Yes, yes, keep it up, keep it up,”

The beautiful voice called out to Arche, who was desperately trying to flee.

Her heart lurched. Casting frantic glances around, Arche tried to see where it

was coming from.

It was from in front and above her.

When had she — the girl from just now was there.

“—[Lightning]!”

Bluish-white lightning leapt from her staff’s head and cleaved through the

night. This was Arche’s strongest attack spell. Even though it pierced the girl,

the smile did not vanish from her face.

Arche was sure of it. This was a being on par with Ainz, which meant that there

was no way Arche could defeat her. The girl cheerfully spoke to Arche, who was

eager to flee.

“「Come, my familiars.」”

An enormous pair of wings extended from behind the girl’s back. They were

like a bat’s in shape, but far, far larger. An enormous bat flew out from behind

her, like it had detached from her body. And of course, no bat with glowing

crimson eyes like that could be a mere beast.

The girl smiled from beside the giant bat, whose wings beat steadily through

the air. It was a smile that froze Arche’s body like ice, a smile that did not seem

to belong on someone her age at all.

“Well then, do continue to flee~”

# 

●

# 

Arche fled.

All she did was flee.

She flew into the forest to lose her pursuer, and the branches scratched her

body as she fled.

Since she had discarded her companions to escape, that meant she had to

make it out of here no matter what. In her mind, she would do anything to make

that happen.

And after a flight of who knew how long, Arche stared despair in the face.

It was a wall.

An invisible wall stood in front of her.

The world went on beyond it, but Arche’s body was blocked by that wall. Arche

was now two hundred meters above ground level and the invisible wall had

reached this high.

“—This is—”

Arche muttered to herself as despair seeped into her heart. She flew and felt

around with her hands. But… wall, wall, wall, still a wall.

No matter where she flew, her hands told her there was something hard in her

way.

“What is this?!”

“A wall, of course.”

It was an answer to her self-directed mutterings. Arche turned around, with

an idea of who she might see.

It was as she had expected. The girl from earlier. But now she had a trio of

giant bats as her escorts.

“Though it seems you’ve gotten the wrong impression. This is the Sixth Floor

of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick. That is to say, you’re

underground.”

“…This?”

Arche pointed to the world. The sky, the stars, the gently blowing wind, the

forest which stretched as far as the eye could see. Although she did not think

this place could be under the earth, when it came to these people, even that

might be a possibility.

“The 41 Supreme Beings, our most august creators, once ruled this place. It

was created by them, and even we don’t understand all of it.”

“—They created a world? That would make them like gods…”

“That’s correct. To us, they are beings on the same level as gods. Gods with

Ainz-sama as their leader.”

Arche looked around.

She had accepted it. As expected, after seeing all this, the only thing she could

do was accept it.

There was no way she would be returning alive.

“Well then, not fleeing?”

“—Would it even be possible?”

“Of course not. There was never any intention to allow you to escape to begin

with.”

“—Is that so.”

Arche gripped her staff tightly with both hands and charged the girl. She could

no longer use spells since she was out of mana. However, even in this most

hopeless of situations she still had to try her best until the very last moment.

This was the duty of Arche, the sole surviving member of Foresight.

“There, there, you’ve done your best.”

The girl’s reply to Arche’s fully determined charge was little more than bored

dismissal.

“Then, your sad little escape attempt ends here… though it’s a shame I

couldn’t see you break down in tears.”

The girl easily caught the staff with one hand, and yanked it toward herself.

Arche was thrown off balance and fell into the arms of the girl. The two of them

ended up embracing in mid-air.

In this position, the girl buried her face into Arche’s neck. Although Arche

tried to struggle, the girl who stuck to her like glue could not be shaken off. She

breathed hotly on Arche’s neck, and Arche’s body quivered.

“…Mm, the stink of sweat…”

Not being able to keep one’s body clean was part and parcel of the worker’s

life for Arche. This was true for all Workers, adventurers, travelers, and anyone

who spent time moving around outside. Even if they got dirty, the appropriate

response would be “So what?”

However, she still felt deeply ashamed at being told this by a girl who was

younger and more beautiful than her.

The girl’s face left Arche’s neck. A feeling of revulsion swept up over Arche as

she looked into those crimson eyes. Within those eyes burned a lust for the

female body, stained with the same carnal desire that men possessed for women.

“Be at ease. You will die without experiencing any suffering. Be grateful to

Ainz-sama for his mercy.”

“—!”

Arche wanted to respond, but instead all she felt was surprise — surprise at

the fact that her body had been immobilized. It was as though those crimson

pupils had stolen away her soul.

At last, Arche realized the true identity of the girl. She was not human — she

was a Vampire.

“…And then…”

The girl’s face drew closer to Arche’s, her tongue slipping past her lips to

lightly lick at Arche’s cheeks.

“…Salty…”

The girl laughed, and despair swallowed Arche’s soul.

That only made the girl laugh harder.

Her lips split apart to her ears. The red of her irises spread to engulf their

respective eyeballs.

With a cracking sound, she opened her mouth. What had once been neat,

pearly white teeth were now things that made people think of medical syringes,

in multiple rows like those of a shark. Her lascivious voice was laced with lewd

undertones, and clear drool oozed from the corners of her mouth.

And then, terror enveloped Arche completely.

“Ahahahahaha!”

Arche’s mind lost hold on consciousness in the face of the laughing monster

that reeked of blood.

The last thing that went through her mind was the faces of her two sisters

waiting for her.

“Ooooooh? Fainted already? …Then there’s no need to knock you out with

magic. You can embrace Death in your dreams~”

# *3*

# 

# 

# 

After handing the intruders over to his subordinates to handle, Ainz activated

the monitor within the Throne Room and scrolled through Nazarick’s data. The

figure which most concerned him — their remaining funds — had only shifted

very slightly. That was because they had hardly activated any cash-item traps.

Thus, it could be counted as a very successful training exercise.

Ainz turned to Albedo — who was nervously awaiting Ainz’s opinion — and

smiled broadly — although a skeletal face could not show any expressions —

before praising her:

“Very well done. While the intruders were all weak, they were fairly skilled

among the humans of this world. In addition, you eliminated them with barely

any expenditures. It seems I can entrust the task of defense to you in future.”

“Thank you for your praise.”

Albedo looked visibly relieved as she bowed her head in gratitude.

“Then, Ainz-sama, are there any problems with the time?”

“It’s fine. I’ve asked Pandora’s Actor; while the people on top think the

Workers are taking their time, they’ve decided to wait one day, or until there’s

some change in the ruins.”

After seeing that none of the Workers had returned by dawn, the adventurers

had flown into a panic, but Momon — Pandora’s Actor — suggested that they

wait another day and see. While they had already arranged that to leave the

campsite and observe from further away in case of emergency, the word of an

adamantite-ranked adventurer carried more weight than their previous plans.

“Then, may I occupy a bit of your precious time? In truth, I have a question to

ask, Ainz-sama.”

“What is it, Albedo? A moment please… alright, it’s fine.”

Ainz turned around after making a final check on Hamsuke and the Lizardmen

through the monitor.

“What is this question?”

“—Yes.” She looked around before speaking. “This concerns what those fools

said just now; how high is searching for the Supreme Beings on your list of

priorities, Ainz-sama?”

“At the top. So long as it does not place the Great Underground Tomb of

Nazarick in danger, it will be our topmost priority,” Ainz answered without

delay.

“I see. I understand. Then, I have a proposal, that you will allow me to put

together a unit under me that will search for the Supreme Beings.”

“What do you mean?”

Ainz’s tone had unconsciously grown stiff, because he realized the dark side

lurking within his heart.

Until this date, he had several opportunities to actively search for his friends.

However, he had kept pushing those plans back because he “lacked manpower”

or “had insufficient information.”

This was because he was afraid of scouring every corner of the world and

finding nothing, so he could not make that decision. Rather than work hard just

to confirm that he was alone, becoming a famous monster held more hope.

“Yes. The lies those fools told just now were of a very low grade and were

instantly seen through. However, we might encounter information in future

whose veracity cannot be easily determined. Therefore, I would like to form a

team to verify the reliability of this information, and at the same time investigate

the whereabouts of the Supreme Beings. After I investigate in detail, I can report

the results to you, Ainz-sama.”

Ainz caressed his chin with a bony hand.

“Is that so…” he murmured to himself. He thought about his conversation

with the Workers, and what he felt was not anger, but emptiness. Wavering

between hope and despair was truly a heart-wrenching thing. His own

sentimentality aside, it would seem that as the group’s leader, it was time for

him to decide to advance, even if it was only by a small step.

“You do not need to do everything on your own, Albedo. I hope you will be

able to continue administering Nazarick well. If you intend to gather

information by heading outside… would Mare or Aura not be better choices? I

hear there are Dark Elves in the outside world.”

“It is as you say. However, there is one factor which makes me uneasy; ‘loss of

control.’ For instance, if she caught wind of Peroroncino-sama, Shalltear would

surely abandon everything and do as she pleased. Similarly, if Aura and Mare

learned of Bukubukuchagama, there is no telling what Aura and Mare will do.”

“I see…” Ainz smiled bitterly as he thought of Shalltear. “Indeed, I feel that is

a possibility.”

“In order to avoid that, I feel a team which is directly loyal to me would be

more appropriate.”

“…So you will not go berserk when you learn about Tabula-san?”

“Please be at ease. As the Guardian Overseer of Nazarick, I will not do so

under any circumstances. I promise.”

“I see…”

When it came to Albedo, a wise person who was the most skilled at the

internal administration of Nazarick, the chances of her going out of control due

to her emotions ought to be very low. While she was a little off-kilter from time

to time, there had never been any problems with the running of Nazarick while

Ainz had been gone, and she was worthy of trust.

“Personally, I feel Demiurge would also be acceptable, but he has many other

duties to cover. Having him bear the weighty task of gathering information

about the other Supreme Beings in addition to those tasks would be somewhat

burdensome.”

“What you said makes sense. Then how about dispatching Pandora’s Actor?”

“I was about to mention that. If possible, I would like to ask you to assign me

Pandora’s Actor as my adjutant, Ainz-sama.”

“I see. Having two of Nazarick’s most intelligent people working together will

reduce the chances of mistakes compared to just one person, but… he still has

his duties in the Treasury. I will lend him to you when the need arises.”

“Thank you, Ainz-sama. May I make several other requests?”

Ainz raised his chin, indicating that she should continue.

“I would like my subordinates for the Supreme Being search team to be

powerful.”

“Of course, I will assign you a group of the highest-leveled vassals.”

“Thank you, Ainz-sama. In addition, I feel it would be very helpful if you could

bestow upon an undead lieutenant hand-crafted by yourself.”

“That, I cannot approve. Indeed, the lieutenants I can make are level 90,

but— ”

Rather than mercenary NPCs, one of Ainz’s skills allowed him to use

experience points to create undead beings — an Overlord Wiseman or a Grim

Reaper Thanatos. Since he could only have one at a time, they were very

powerful. However, this world was not like *Yggdrasil* where large amounts of

experience points were easy to come by, and so he wanted to avoid skills which

consumed experience points.

“Yes, I’ll pass on that. Albedo, you will be in charge of the team, your adjutant

will be Pandora’s Actor, and the other team members will be monsters.”

“Understood. There is also one more thing; I would like to keep this group

secret and not let the other Guardians know about it.”

“Why is that? Won’t it be better to have the Guardians’ help?”

“No. If news is carelessly leaked, the Guardians or the other creations of the

Supreme Beings might ask us to bring them along in order to visually confirm

the sightings. In that case, they might end up falling into a trap if that news was

bait. My abilities are oriented towards defense, so I might be able to escape on

my own, but it would be more difficult if I had to protect others as well.”

“That makes sense. Very well, Albedo. We will proceed as you see fit.”

“Thank you, Ainz-sama!”

Albedo bowed deeply in thanks, and her long hair hung down, covering her

face.

“That’s fine. Then, I’ll leave this to you.”

“Please be at ease, Ainz-sama! The secret unit executing your most important

order will not disappoint you.”

Ainz was puzzled. The phrasing of her reply seemed a little strange.

*Forget it, it’s fine.*

“Then let us select your subordinates. I won’t touch the vassals already

assigned to the various floors, but make new ones instead. How many level 80-

odd monsters do you need?”

“Let’s start with 15.”

“15? That’s a bit too…”

Halfway through, Ainz shook his head. Searching for his past friends was an

important task; he should not be considering the expense at all.

“No, that’s fine. I understand.”

“There is another thing I would like to ask; may I have command authority

over Rubedo?”

“Denied.”

Ainz replied instantly.

Rubedo was the single most powerful NPC in Nazarick. Purely in terms of

melee combat, she was stronger than Sebas, Cocytus and Albedo. In all

likelihood, even a fully equipped Ainz could not beat her, and even Shalltear

would be considered weak in comparison to her.

*The only people who can beat her are the ones from the Eighth Floor, and they’d*

*have to use World Class Items. No matter how strong she is, she probably wouldn’t be*

*able to fight one of them to a draw, but still…*

“While the activation experiment was a success, I do not intend to mobilize it

for the moment. I wish to ask you; why do you need so much fighting power?”

“It embarrasses me to say it, but would you be willing to listen, Ainz-sama?”

“Go ahead.”

“Since this is a rare chance to do so, I wanted to put together the strongest

possible team.”

“Hahahaha—!”

Albedo’s wish might have sounded like that of a child, but Ainz keenly

understood it, and he could not help laughing. The emotion was promptly

suppressed, but ripples of mirth remained in its wake.

“Ainz-sama!”

Upon seeing the distressed look on Albedo’s face, Ainz smiled congenially to

her — although his face did not move — and replied:

“Sorry, sorry. No, hm, that is quite interesting. So that’s it. In that case, since

she’s your sister, I shall turn command authority over to you.”

“Will you really permit that?”

“Of course; go assemble your dream team. For all we know, we might need to

use that team’s power in the future.”

“Thank you very much, Ainz-sama!”

Albedo bowed deeply, and so he could not see her face, but Ainz imagined she

would be smiling benignly as always, and so he turned his attention to the

monitors once more. Just then, someone entered the Throne Room; it was

Entoma. She walked up to the Throne, then genuflected before him and bowed

her head.

“My apologies.”

“What is it, Entoma?”

Albedo’s voice sounded very stiff. Entoma replied with a “Yes” and continued

answering from her kneeling position.

“Aura-sama and Mare-sama are due to set out, and so I have come to report it

to you.”

“Is that so… raise your head.”

Entoma replied with a clipped “Yes” once more and then looked up.

“There’s still time, so I will go send them off. Communicating with magic is

far too boring. Entoma, pardon me, but go inform the two of them.”

“Understood.

Entoma rose and made to leave. Albedo watched her back as she went, then

leaned over to Ainz and asked:

“…Ainz-sama, are you not displeased? They should have sent a maid other

than Entoma. I will scold them later.”

“…Why do you say that?”

“No, I simply felt that they should not have let you hear that rude girl’s voice,

Ainz-sama—”

“Oh, I don’t mind. In fact, it was my suggestion that Entoma take her — wait!

Entoma!”

“Yes! Is something the matter?”

Entoma was just about to rush back when Ainz held out his hand to stop her,

indicating that she should answer him from her current location.

“What happened to the other parts? Were they well-utilized?”

“Yes. The head went to a Silk Hat. The arms were shared between the

Deadman Struggles. Demiurge-sama took the skin. The other parts were fodder

for Grant’s children. I believe there was no wastage.”

“Really now? Very good. A hunter’s duty is to make good use of every bit of

his kill. If all hunters did that, it would be called provision.”

“You really are… too kind. As expected of the Supreme One, you show

kindness even to such filthy little thieves. Surely everyone in Nazarick would

shed a tear if they heard what you just said, Ainz-sama.”

Albedo’s voice trembled with emotion as she spoke. Entoma’s eyes were filled

with a respect that transcended the norm.

“…Umu. Ah, it’s fine… that’s just my personal opinion, it’s not meant to force

you to be like me. Although, I still… feel that making full use of it is just common

courtesy.”

“Understood, I’m certain the others will make good use of theirs too!”

As he saw the two of them bowing deeply before him, Ainz had a feeling like

he had missed something somewhere, and all he could reply with was “Umu.”

# *4*

# 

# 

# 

The Ministry of Magic had several meeting rooms and guest rooms. Fluder

was headed to the most lavishly furnished guest room of them all. It was a room

which was only used for visits from the Emperor or other highly placed people.

Fluder stood by the door of the room and checked his grooming.

His robe was exquisite and fit to be worn to the evening galas organized by

the Emperor, while the splash of cologne on his collar and sleeves radiated a

heartening fragrance.

Fluder had no interest in politics or social interactions. Rather, he hoped to

be able to focus all his efforts on magical research, so he found all other matters

annoying. However, he knew that he could not completely ignore such problems.

He did not want to wound the Empire’s dignity by appearing unkempt.

*Very good, all’s well.*

After assuring himself that his clothes were in an immaculate state, he

knocked on the door, and then entered.

There were two adventurers in the luxurious room. One was a warrior,

dressed in jet black plate armor like the Death Knight from just now. And then,

the other one was a beautiful woman who was so fair that she even managed to

mesmerize Fluder for a moment.

*So they are Momon of Darkness and the Beautiful Princess Nabe, then?*

“Forgive me for keeping the two of you waiting.”

As Fluder quietly closed the door, he suddenly had a strange feeling.

“…Odd…”

He remained at the door, staring at the jaw-dropping beauty.

*…I can’t see it?*

Fluder’s eyes should have been able to see an image superimposed over her.

However, he could not see it now, which left him speechless from shock and

puzzlement.

Fluder’s natural Talent was the ability to see the auras around arcane magic

casters, and thus the tier of spells they could use.

However, Fluder’s Talent could not sense the auras from around them,

despite hearing that the Beautiful Princess Nabe of Darkness was an arcane

magic caster.

*Protection from divinations?*

That was the only possibility, but that in turn raised new questions of its own.

Why had she warded herself against divinations? Normal adventurers would not

erect such defenses. That was because using their strength on such matters was

too troublesome and few situations arose where one needed to be constantly

aware of such things. Besides, not taking off one’s protection for divinations

when meeting them was quite rude.

*Well, I used a detection ability myself, which was somewhat impolite too… but why*

*does she have to hide her power?*

Fluder’s Talent was well known, and perhaps she had done so to protect

herself, but he still did not know the reason for it.

Upon seeing Fluder frozen in place, his somewhat surprised guests asked:

“Is something the matter?”

“Ohh, please forgive my rudeness.”

Fluder sat before Momon, but he could not help sneaking peeks at Nabe.

“Ah, I see. Let’s begin, then.”

*Begin what?* Before Fluder could ask, Momon took the initiative and said:

“…Nabe, it’s time for you to take your ring off.”

“Understood.”

Nabe removed her ring. In that moment—

# 

●

# 

It felt like an explosion had gone off in his face.

A cry of “What—!” escaped his throat.

Nabe’s body radiated a world-shaking wave of power.

His body was not truly being assaulted by a wave of overpressure. This was a

surge of might which only someone with Fluder’s Talent could see.

Fluder curled up into a ball and trembled, like a man lashed by icy winds.

“Im… possible…”

It was not possible, it could not be possible. There was no way — no way that

there was someone more powerful than himself.

But he could not reject it out of hand, because the scene before him was

reality. His ability had never betrayed him before — her power was far in excess

of his. That was the pure and undeniable truth.

“The seventh… no, don’t tell me, this flow of power is… proof of the eighth…?”

If that were so, then it would be the stuff of legends.

Fluder could no longer speak, because magic of the fifth tier was the domain

of heroes. And the sixth tier which Fluder had reached was *terra incognita.* And

now, someone who had easily gone a tier beyond had suddenly appeared before

his eyes.

And she was such a young and beautiful woman too.

*Could it be that her appearance doesn’t correspond to her age?*

As Fluder trembled in shock, he noticed Momon removing one of his black

gauntlets, and then he removed one of the rings he wore.

“—!”

In that instant, the world was subsumed into light, and Fluder felt his

consciousness flee him.

He could not understand what had just taken place before his eyes. Even

Fluder, who had lived over 200 years, even this man who could use the highest

tiers of magic humanity could reach, could not comprehend this reality.

“This… this… this is… this is too unbelievable!”

Hot fluid coursed down Fluder’s cheeks. However, he did not have the

presence of mind or the composure to wipe it away. The immense shock had

overwhelmed his mind.

Who could have imagined this? That the Dark Warrior of song and story was

actually an arcane magic caster, and one who occupied a height so great that

Fluder could not hope to reach the soles of his feet?.

“If that is the eighth tier… then this is the ninth… no… this really is… oh,

gods…”

The overwhelming might emanating from the Dark Warrior Momon far

exceeded that of Nabe, who sat by his side. Since he had surpassed Nabe, a magic

caster estimated to be of the eighth tier, then exactly what heights of magic

could this Momon reach?

Fluder’s soul answered the question that had appeared in the corner of his

mind.

# 

●

# 

—The tenth tier. It was an absolute zenith whose existence was known, but

which had never been verified. And now, a man who came from that exalted

domain had appeared before his eyes.

# 

●

# 

Fluder rose to his feet, then knelt before Momon, tears streaming from his

eyes.

“…In the past, I believed in a lesser deity who governed magic. However, if

you are not that god, then I shall promptly renounce my faith. That is because

the true god has deigned to appear before me.”

Fluder kowtowed with all his might, plastering his head to the ground. There

was pain, but the uncontrollable joy in his heart meant that the pain lost all

meaning to him.

“I know this is extremely rude, but I beg a favor of you, upon my hands and

knees! Please, bestow your teachings upon me! I wish to glimpse the abyss of

magic! I beg you! I beg you!”

“—And what sort of price are you willing to pay for that?”

That voice was as cold as an iceberg. Fully a hundred out of a hundred would

describe it that way; yet to Fluder’s ears, it was a sweet and pleasant voice that

set his heart aflutter. Of course, he knew of the venom concealed within those

words. Still — what of it?

Fluder did not hesitate for even a moment. He was willing to pay the price.

He was willing to hand over his soul.

“Everything! Yes, I will pledge everything I have to you! Oh Lord of the Abyss!

Oh unfathomable one!”

“…Very well. If you are willing to give me everything, then my knowledge shall

be yours. I shall grant your wish.”

“Ohhh! Ohhhhh!”

Fluder ground his forehead into the floor as he shed tears of joy. His heart,

frozen and stiff from jealousy, had melted. After waiting over 200 years, he had

finally obtained a chance to fulfill the wish he had held for so long.

The utterly excited Fluder kept his forehead touched to the floor as he

crawled over to Momon’s feet and kissed his boots. He had originally planned to

lick them clean. However, the calm portion of his mind worried that his master

and god would be revolted by him, and so he settled for politeness instead.

“That’s enough, I understand your loyalty.”

“Ohhh! Thank you! …My Master!”

“Now then, your first order. Deliver live sacrifices to my fortress—”

# 

●

# 

“Gramps! Gramps! What’s wrong, Gramps?”

Lost in thought, Fluder came round when he heard someone calling out to

him.

Fluder blinked a few times, then he remembered where he was, and nodded

to the person who had called out to him.

“Forgive me, Your Majesty. I was thinking about something.”

Before Fluder was the only person who could call him “Gramps.” That person

was the Emperor of the Baharuth Empire, Jircniv Rune Farlord El-Nix.

Normally, there would only be a few people in this room, but right now, there

were many people gathered here. There was Emperor Jircniv and four

bodyguards. There was Fluder Paradyne, the highest-ranking magic caster in the

Empire. Then there were 10 loyal and capable ministers, whose abilities could

effectively support their outstandingly intelligent Emperor. In addition, one of

the people hailed as the strongest in the Empire — “Lightning Bolt” Baziwood

Peshmel of the Empire’s Four Knights — was present.

All of them sat where they pleased, and they had been discussing the direction

that the Empire would take since just now. The sheets of paper scattered all

around bore witness to the intensity of their debate. One of them had even

shouted himself hoarse.

The young Emperor with the title of Bloody spoke something to Fluder that

he would never have said to anyone else.

“No, don’t worry about it. After all, I’ve made you worry about a lot of things.

You’re getting on in years, so I’d like to let you enjoy them. Unfortunately, there

are many things which I must bother you about, so please forgive me.”

“I thank Your Majesty for his concern. However, I am a faithful servant of

Your Majesty. Please, order me around as you see fit.”

After being thanked for his service, Fluder nodded his head slightly.

*I’ve raised a good boy.*

Those thoughts went through Fluder’s mind as he looked upon the handsome

young man.

Fluder had begun working for the Empire about six generations ago.

His relationship with the Emperor at that time — the sixth Emperor before

Jircniv — had been quite bad. However, Fluder was a skilled magic caster who

could cast spells of a high tier, so after entering public service, he soon reached

the middle to upper ranks of the Court Wizards.

For this reason, Fluder had become closer to the fifth Emperor before Jircniv.

After becoming the Head Court Wizard, he began teaching the fourth Emperor

before Jircniv about magic.

Ever since the third Emperor before Jircniv ascended to the throne, he had

taken on the role of teaching the Emperor about all sorts of knowledge, and he

had considerable influence in implementing policy.

And now, there was the present Emperor — his beloved boy.

None of the Emperors he had served through the generations were

incompetent. The heavens seemed to have smiled upon every one of them; they

were all talented and intelligent boys — thought the sixth Emperor before

Jircniv had been old at the time. And among all of them, the current Emperor

possessed intelligence to surpass all of them. He might have been begun laying

the foundations for it since two generations ago, but the fact that he could

successfully institute himself as an autocrat was thanks to his excellent

competence.

Fluder deeply doted on Jircniv Rune Farlord El-Nix.

Fluder had taught him like he was his own son. He was certain that the

Emperor too loved and respected him like a second father.

Even so—

# 

●

# 

# 

Fluder could discard a man he loved like his own son.

*I want to see the abyss of magic, Jir. I will cast aside anything for it without*

*hesitation. Even a darling lad like you.*

# 

●

# 

“Then, Your Majesty, we’ve decided to completely halt the offensive against

the Kingdom, is it?”

“Indeed. That’s because investigating the demon Jaldabaoth is more

important. Gramps, did you learn anything?”

“I regret to say that despite my investigations, I have not found any

information yet, Your Majesty.”

Indeed, it had all been arranged beforehand.

“Paradyne-sama. Can you not use magic to investigate?”

Fluder turned to the man who had addressed him, carefully faked an

expression, and then looked coldly at him.

“Indeed, magic is potentially capable of performing the impossible. That is— ”

“—Forgive me, gramps. Once you start talking about this sort of thing, you

tend to ramble on all day. Please dispense with that for now.”

“I understand, Your Majesty,” Fluder replied with a somewhat unhappy look

on his face. Then, he started speaking again in a pedagogical tone: “There are

ways to resist magical investigation. For instance, this room is soundproofed;

you all should know this. Similarly, impeding divination magic is also simple

enough to accomplish.”

“…I see. In other words, there are ways to resist it, so it’s very difficult.”

“Precisely. However, you would be lucky to get away with a simple spell

failure. High-end magic casters can even prepare counterattacks against this

sort of magic; if things go badly, those can directly kill the diviner who is casting

spells on them.”

*What use would my pitiful grasp of magic be to the Supreme One… nobody is more*

*fitting of being called the Supreme One. I need to demonstrate my usefulness as soon as*

*possible—*

Several people had disgusted looks on their faces when they learned that their

adversary could instantly kill people in the process of striking back, but Fluder

was utterly uninterested.

“So according to your words,” one of the ministers said as he picked up a sheet

of paper. “Does the fact that you could detect the base of this Ainz Ooal Gown

magic caster with a spell not imply that his abilities are beneath yours, Paradyne-

sama?”

“Naive!”

Fluder struggled to keep himself from smiling bitterly as he continued in a

harsh tone, the better to impress the depths of his annoyance on the other party.

“You are too naive. It was only after I witnessed him saving Carne Village…

no, I noticed he had only saved Carne Village and then conducted magical

surveillance of the area, which was how I noticed the ruins. Since I had no

recollection of the ruins being there, I continued my observation, which was how

I noticed a magic caster who looked like Ainz Ooal Gown entering those ruins.

You must remember that I discovered him entirely by chance, else you will be

inviting disaster upon your own head!”

Part of that was the truth. Only a fool would take such a great being lightly.

No, he too had been such a fool; ignorance was a truly tragic thing.

Fluder quietly laughed at his foolish self from the past. At that time, he had

truly been clueless.

“Forgive me.”

Fluder waved his hand to accept the man’s apology.

“Oh, that’s right, Gramps. What about the Workers you sent into his home?”

“One of the spies following them sent back a report via [Message]. It seems

they are all dead.”

Jircniv counted the days on his fingers, and then his eyes widened slightly. He

had heard that the people who had been sent out were quite capable Workers.

The fact that such fighting power had been annihilated in a day or less was quite

surprising.

Needless to say, Fluder was not surprised. He felt that such an outcome was

inevitable. However, the look on his face was one of disbelief.

“…Is that so? That said, magical information alone is not completely reliable.

How long until the adventurers return?”

“They decided to fall back immediately since nobody came back alive, but it

seems it will take them four days to come back.”

“Waiting for the returning adventurers to provide us with their information…

That’ll be at least five days. Until then, our hands are tied.”

[Message] was a very unreliable way of transmitting information. That was

because it became less clear the longer the distance between them. In addition,

there was another reason why the Empire did not place its trust in methods like

[Message].

The most famous example was the tragedy of Gartenberg.

Roughly 300 years ago, that country had set up a [Message] network between

their cities to increase the speed of information transfer. It was a humanoid

nation ruled by magic casters. Due to their over-reliance on [Message], it fell

into chaos after receiving just three false reports. The cities warred against each

other and on top of that they were attacked by monsters and demi-humans, and

thus the country perished.

Apart from that, the bards also sang songs about husbands who murdered

their wives after being informed of the latter’s betrayal, only to find out that it

had been fake news all along.

As a result, very few people trusted [Message] for passing on information.

Rather, those who placed too much faith in [Message] were treated as idiots.

Jircniv was one of them. He made use of [Message]. However, he corroborated

it with intelligence from other sources; he would never solely rely on magic.

“Still, that man was a moron. If he had hired Workers from E-Rantel, things

would have fitted our plan better. Of course, it’s precisely because he’s

incompetent that he was dancing in the palm of my hand, but being too useless

is problematic too. He ought to be better bait, at least.”

“It is as Your Majesty says.”

# 

●

# 

Jircniv furrowed his brows as he heard Fluder agree with him.

Fluder had proposed a plan several days ago, which he had accepted. Said plan

had two aims.

The first was to grasp Ainz Ooal Gown’s personality.

According to Fluder’s investigations, Ainz Ooal Gown’s reaction was to not

leave the tomb for several days, so they determined that said tomb was his home

base. Thus, they dispatched the Workers there, to observe how Ainz Ooal Gown

would react.

Would he treat the people who barged into his domicile kindly, or mount stiff

resistance?

In the end, the Workers had been slaughtered to the last, and from there, they

had learned about part of his character.

The other aim was to ruin the Kingdom’s relationship with Ainz Ooal Gown.

It would have been better to hire Workers in E-Rantel, but unfortunately things

had not gone that smoothly.

*It seems he was not that stupid after all.*

All the Count had been told was that those were unknown ruins. It had been

enough of a risk for a noble of the Empire to barge into ruins within Kingdom

territory, and hiring workers from the Kingdom would have required even more

courage. It was hard to fault him for using Empire Workers.

However that would mean they could not spoil the relationship between E-

Rantel — or perhaps the Re-Estize Kingdom — and Ainz Ooal Gown. Therefore,

in order to achieve their second aim, they had to send information on this

unknown tomb to the Kingdom’s Adventurer’s Guild.

“Momon’s arrival at the Empire played right into our hands.”

“Indeed. Now, he will tell the Guild over there about the unknown ruins and

how the Workers were all wiped out. This way, the Kingdom will know the

Empire wants to search those ruins, and they’ll mount an official investigation

on their own.”

It was in order to achieve that objective that they had forced the involvement

of the Adventurer’s Guild in this. Of course, they had not done so in the

Emperor’s name. They had simply spread some rumors through their spies to

encourage such an occurrence.

This incident had to be treated as a foolish noble running wild. In this way,

even if the Empire’s involvement were revealed, Ainz Ooal Gown’s hostility

would be directed to the manipulated Count, and Jircniv could instead build a

friendly relationship with him.

“Naturally, the Kingdom’s adventurers will invade the lair of Ainz Ooal Gown,

who responds to intrusions with deadly force. What sort of response will a

powerful magic caster make against the Kingdom? And what will the Kingdom

do when it is attacked? I do look forward to it,” Jircniv laughed. Then, just in

case, he asked:

“I already know the power of Ainz Ooal Gown. He can easily eliminate Worker

teams. This matter ought to be neatly handled and taken care of by offering up

the head of a single foolish noble.”

“But of course. We have taken great pains to handle this, and only the people

here know the truth.”

“Good. But just in case — what was that?”

A tremor interrupted Jircniv’s words. The windows in the room and furniture

rattled. However, it did not seem to be an earthquake. It was more like a single

great shaking caused by some massive entity crashing into the ground.

“What happened? Hurry up and check — what’s this ruckus about?! What’s

going on!”

The wails Jircniv heard were not just from inside the room, but outside as

well. The walls of this room were thick and sturdy. In that case, just how loudly

were the people outside screaming? What had brought about this screaming —

the least suitable sound for this place?

One of his vassals looked at the courtyard from whence the screaming came

and after examining the situation, his face turned pale as he answered Jircniv’s

question.

“Your Majesty! A Dragon! A Dragon has landed in the courtyard!”

For a brief moment, a wave of stupefaction passed through the room. Nobody

could immediately parse the meaning of that sentence. No, they could not

understand it. Everyone knew that he could not be lying, yet they all ran to the

window to witness it with their own eyes.

They practically tore open the heavy curtains. After seeing what lay beyond

them, the scene outside the translucent glass window — that of a Dragon in the

middle of the courtyard — every single one of them was speechless and gawping

with their mouths open.

“Why… why is there a Dragon there? Where did that Dragon come from?”

“Foreign Affairs! Which Dragon-riding boor was scheduled to barge into the

courtyard today?!”

“I don’t know anything about this!”

“Have you seen the Council Alliance’s Dragons before? Could that be a Dragon

from the Council Alliance?”

“…That Dragon doesn’t match the description I was given. A diplomat told

me, so it ought to be reliable.”

“All that isn’t important; surely the biggest problem is letting the opposition

force their way into the Imperial Palace, right!? His Majesty is here; what are the

Royal Air Guards doing!”

Dragons possessed powerful bodies sheathed in thick scales, their lifespans

vastly exceeded those of mankind, they had all manner of special abilities and

magic, and they were the mightiest beings in the world. Of course, Dragons’

strength varied between individuals, and there were occasional stories of an

adventurer defeating a Dragon. But throughout the course of history, there were

also cities devastated by a wrathful Dragon, and sometimes even entire

countries. A city in a country from the south had been destroyed by a Dragon

some twenty-odd years ago, and it was still fresh in people’s memory.

The fact that such a being had appeared in the middle of the Imperial Palace

was a grave situation.

Even Jircniv held his breath as he surveyed the situation. Just then, he saw

two people hop down from the Dragon’s back.

He squinted, and saw that they were two children whose skin had been tanned

by the sun.

“Those ought to be Dark Elves.”

Fluder calmly stated the species of those two.

“Paradyne-sama! Where did that Dragon come from! And who are those two

people?”

“Well, I don’t recognize that Dragon…”

The Dragon in the courtyard was surrounded by knights, to say nothing of the

two people who had just alighted from it. Those knights were the pride of

Empire, yet he could not bring himself to put his faith in them when they stood

before a Dragon. That was the strongest living being for you.

A man strode forth from among the knights, a man who carried a shield in

each hand.

“Oi, oi, is he going out there? While it can’t be helped… losing him like this

would be a shame.”

The person who had stepped forth was one of the Empire’s Four Knights,

“The Immovable” Nazami Enec.

He was one of the topmost warriors in the Kingdom, the most adept of the

Four Knights at defensive battles. This warrior might be able to resist many

energy attacks, but he seemed awfully insignificant when compared to a Dragon.

Everyone could only nod in agreement at “Lightning Bolt” Baziwood Peshmel’s

prediction of his colleague’s fate.

“Your Majesty, please take shelter!”

“Where can we run? Tell me where can we find safety?”

Jircniv snorted at the suggestion from the minister who had come to his

senses.

“But!”

“—I understand what you want to say. But if we abandon the Imperial Palace

and run, we will become the butt of jokes. The same applies even if our adversary

is a Dragon. While it does not look like a Dragon of the Council Alliance, if our

foe did this while knowing I would not flee… they say Dragons are very

intelligent; it seems it knows the Empire’s political situation very well.”

Jircniv could apply pressure to the nobles because he had the military power

of the knights as backing. If the Emperor and his knights quit the Imperial Palace

and fled because a Dragon appeared there, they would certainly make light of

the Emperor’s military power and revolt. He did not think he would lose to

whatever ragtag bunch of misfits they could scrape together, but it would

severely weaken the Empire.

*Whether we fight or flee, we still lose. What a troublesome move. Where did that*

*Dragon come from?*

Soon, more and more people gathered in the courtyard. There were 40

Imperial Guardsmen surrounding the Dragon and the two people, as well as 60

knights. In addition to that, there were arcane and divine magic casters scattered

throughout their number.

“120 people will not be enough to deal with them. I think I should go over too,

Your Majesty.”

Jircniv furrowed his brow slightly. Fluder was the trump card of the Empire.

He was not sure whether playing that card against a mighty being like the Dragon

would do any good. However, he was confident that Fluder could escape even

after being pressed into dire straits, and that trust cut through his hesitation.

Jircniv did not know the truth.

He did not know that Fluder’s offer to go forth was to avoid Jircniv asking him

to retreat with teleportation magic.

“I’ll leave it to you, gramps. Also, could you ask The Immovable to stand

down?”

“Understood. However, those people are unfathomable. I feel they are

incredibly strong; please prepare yourself to flee, Your Majesty.”

With that, Fluder opened the window. He jumped straight out and flew into

the sky with a flight spell.

“Er, can everyone hear me? I’m a subordinate of Ainz Ooal Gown-sama, and

my name’s Aura Bella Fiora!”

Just then, an incredibly loud voice echoed through the surroundings.

“The Emperor of this nation sent a bunch of rude chaps to the Great

Underground Tomb of Nazarick, where Ainz-sama stays! Ainz-sama is *very*

unhappy. So if you don’t apologize, we’ll wipe this country out!”

Jircniv’s face twisted. Who had learned this answer, and how? How had he

followed the clues back to the truth?

He looked around the room. Everyone was staring in shock at the Emperor.

The people who understood the doubts in Jircniv’s heart all shook their heads.

“For starters, we’re going to kill all the people here! Mare!”

The other Dark Elf plunged her staff into the surface of the courtyard. In that

moment, it was as though a localized earthquake had occurred in the courtyard.

It was “as though” because Jircniv did not feel the earth move at all. However,

the ground still split open around the Dragon and the Dark Elves, crevasses

yawning open in patterns more complex than a spider’s web.

The knights, the Imperial Guardsmen, the magic casters — apart from the

airborne Fluder, everyone was swallowed up by the earth.

The Dark Elf seemed to have skillfully excluded herself and her allies from the

effective radius of the attack. She stood there nonchalantly, and once she pulled

out her staff, the ground hurriedly put itself back together, just like when the

earthquake had occurred. However, since it had come together too quickly, the

ground swelled up, following the previous spiderweb pattern, and it became a

small hillock.

The knights who had been gathered in the courtyard just now had all vanished

without a trace. The end had come too suddenly.

“Alright~ we killed them all. Now then, for all the humans in this city… er, I

don’t know who’s the Emperor, so never mind! If the Emperor doesn’t show

himself right now, we’ll destroy this city! Emperor-san, please come out now!”

“Your… Your Majesty.”

The Chief Minister was trembling, his face deathly pale as he ushered Jircniv

forward.

“…So they rode a Dragon here because we trod on the Dragon’s tail, then?”

Jircniv fought to quash the trembling in his voice. The supreme being in the

Empire, the Emperor who held all power in his hand, could not show fear before

his subjects.

“Ainz Ooal Gown… what manner of man… no, now’s not the time to think

about that sort of thing.”

Jircniv shouted from the window:

“I am the Emperor, Jircniv Rune Farlord El-Nix! I wish to speak with you! May

I trouble you fine envoys to enter the palace!”

He turned to the Chief Minister:

“Prepare the finest reception for them! *Right now!*”

The ministers scrambled out of the room, and Jircniv’s eyes went from their

backs to the Dark Elves, who were looking at him.

“…I underestimated them. If those are just subordinates… don’t tell me I can’t

handle these people… that said, I won’t back down here. If they wish to parley…

then we shall fight a war of words. Ainz Ooal Gown, watch as I break your

ambitions!”

Epilogue

Epilogue

# 

“Then, here’s the 100 gold coins as promised, and here’s the receipt.”

He looked at the contents of the purse, then nodded in satisfaction. Arche’s

father signed the parchment handed to him without a moment’s hesitation.

Finally, he put his family’s seal on it. The practiced nature of these movements

proved that he had done them several times before.

“Will this be alright?”

The man looked at the parchment, and then nodded. If Hekkeran and Imina

were here, they would have looks of absolute disgust on their faces. This man

was the one who had gone to the inn where Foresight had stayed.

He looked over the parchment that had been handed to him several more

times, made sure everything was in order and that the ink had dried, then rolled

it up and slotted it into the parchment case.

“I’ve confirmed that there’s no problems.”

Then, the man indicated the purse before Arche’s father.

“Aren’t you going to make sure?”

“Ahhh, a coin more or less isn’t a big deal.”

“Really now?” the man replied to Arche’s father as he nodded grandly.

Of course, he had checked it earlier, and the full amount was there. However,

a family whose fortunes had declined enough to borrow money to survive could

not take even a single gold coin for granted. No, perhaps this family had been

doomed once someone like him had become its heir.

To the man, however, none of that was important as long as the father was a

good client.

“Then, the interest and repayment schedule will be the same as before, no?”

The head of the house responded to his question with the same magnanimous

— certain of his superior status — nod of his head.

The man nodded in acknowledgment.

“…Ah, yes, is your daughter doing well?”

“Hm?”

The man remembered that this family had three daughters, and so he added:

“I refer to Arche-san.”

“Oh, Arche. She’s off earning money.”

“…Is that so.”

*And what are you doing while your daughter’s making money?*

The man adeptly hid the look of disdain in his eyes as the thought crossed his

mind.

He could not help but pity the girl for having such a father.

After all, the man was not a monster.

It was simply that the most important thing was that the principal and

interest had to be paid, and that they had to keep borrowing money from him.

He had no intention of interfering with other people’s families.

“She brings a few coins back and she gets all carried away.”

As he heard the father’s unhappy reply, the man furrowed his brows. It would

be troublesome if any sticky business happened which hampered their ability to

pay up. Besides, the interest from this family had made him a fortune, so he

would like very much to keep doing business with them. Therefore, he decided

to try asking about something which he would normally not have bothered with.

“Did something happen?”

“No, nothing of the sort. Just a daughter forgetting how much care she

received ever since she was a child and going against her father.”

“That’s good…”

“Honestly! I need to give her a good scolding! She needs to know the attitude

a noble ought to have!”

The man would never speak what was in his heart. However, he had this one

thing to say.

“It must be tough.”

“Exactly. Really, that stupid daughter…”

The man had not specified who he was referring to, and so the father had

assumed that the man was talking about his own hardship and muttered to

himself.

A hundred gold trading coins was a huge sum. However, given the usual

circumstances, the father would probably spend it all right away, whereupon he

would look the man up again. However, the man decided that it would be better

not to lend him any more until this sum was paid up.

As he thought of that, the man surveyed the interior of the room.

To the man’s eyes, the room was dripping with exquisite furniture. At the very

least, he would be able to recover the principal amount. And if selling the

furniture was not enough to raise the required money—-

The man looked down to hide the emotion rising in his eyes.

“When you get down to it, a daughter of the Furt family shouldn’t be doing

dirty work like that. She works with plebeians, who are doubtlessly of base

character.”

“…Really?”

The man recalled the two faces he had seen in the bar as he answered. There

was no telling how he had interpreted the inflection of that response, but the

father continued explaining, as though to make an excuse for himself.

“Oh, I’m not saying all plebs are like that. I mean the adventuring sort.”

“Perhaps.”

“Don’t you think so? They were probably the ones who made my daughter

turn on me. I need to find a chance to give her a good talking-to. Honestly, a

daughter ought to be listening to her father. Actually daring to talk back to me,

who does she think she is?”

The man glanced at the furious father, then rose from his chair.

“…Then, I have other places to go, so I’ll take my leave. Do remember to pay

on time.”

# 

●

# 

“When’s Onee-sama coming back?”

“She’ll be back real soon!”

There were two young girls in the room. They sat on the bed like it was a chair,

and the two girls who sat side by side looked the same.

The pale faces were flushed slightly pink, calling to mind the image of angels.

Given that they looked very similar to their elder sister, it was very easy to

imagine how they would look once they grew up.

Both of them were dressed in the same way, in immaculate, pure white one-

piece dresses, and a pair of pale, slender legs kicked beneath their skirts.

“Really?”

“Really!”

“Is that so?”

“Just so.”

“When Onee-sama comes back, we’ll be moving house, right?”

“Of course!”

The two of them were very happy. They had not seriously thought about what

moving house entailed, only that the big sister they loved the most would no

longer leave them. That made them very happy.

Their big sister — Arche — often went out. They did not know what their big

sister did, but they both knew that their big sister was doing something very

important. Therefore, they decided not to be naughty, but they could not help

wanting to play with their gentle sister.

Indeed. The two of them liked Arche more than anything else.

They liked their gentle, yet knowledgeable sister who treated them nicely.

“Why isn’t Onee-sama back yet~?”

“Why isn’t she back yet~?”

“I’m looking forward to it, Kuuderika.”

“Mmm, very much, Uleirika.”

“I want Onee-chan to read me a story~”

“I want Onee-chan to sleep with me~”

“Kuuderika, you’re so cunning~”

“Uleirika, you’re cunning too~”

After that, the two of them looked at each other, and then smiled in the same

happy way, before laughing in an adorable fashion, like the tinkling of silver bells.

“Then, Kuuderika can come sleep with Onee-sama too.”

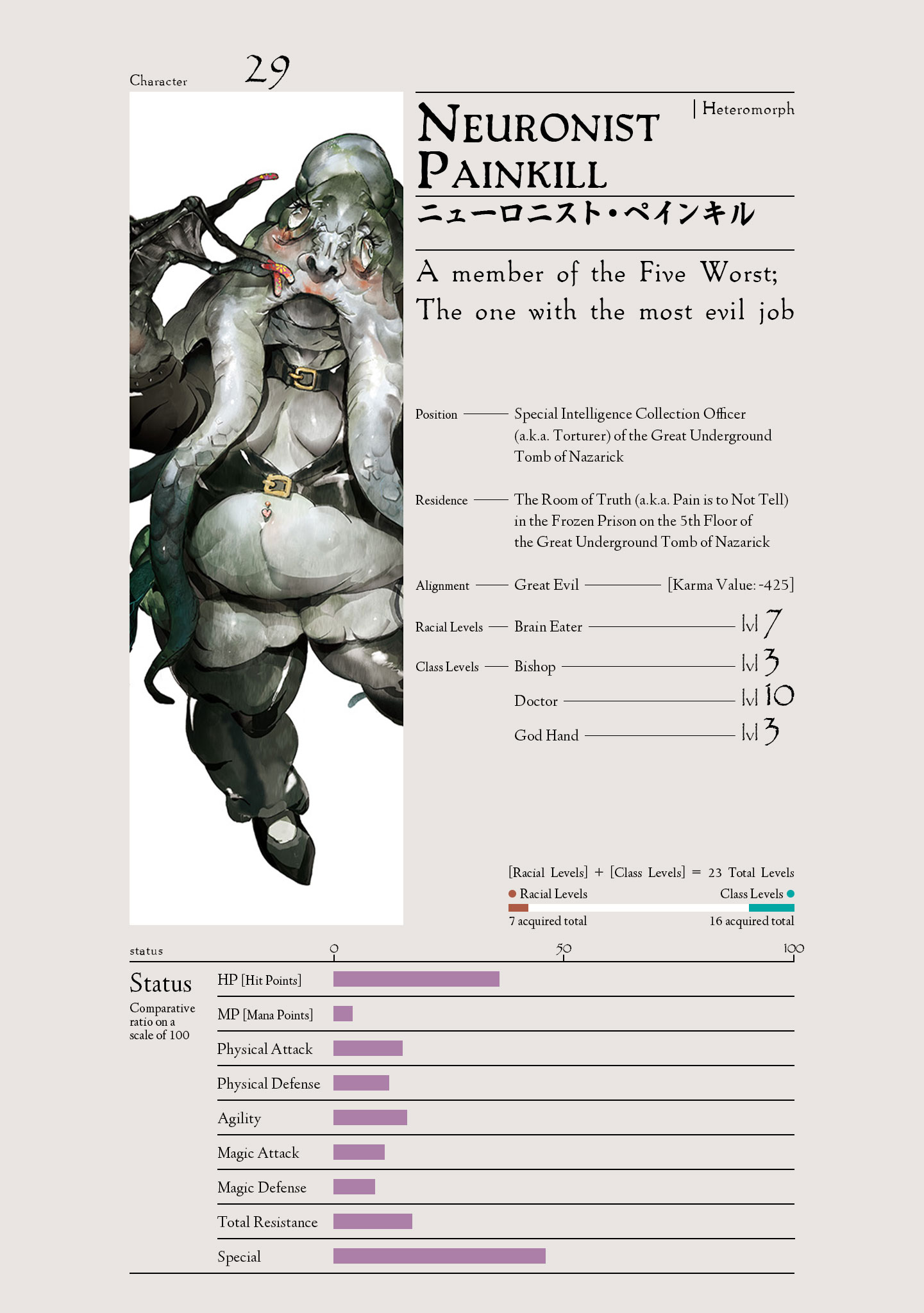
“Mm, Uleirika can sleep with Onee-chan too.”

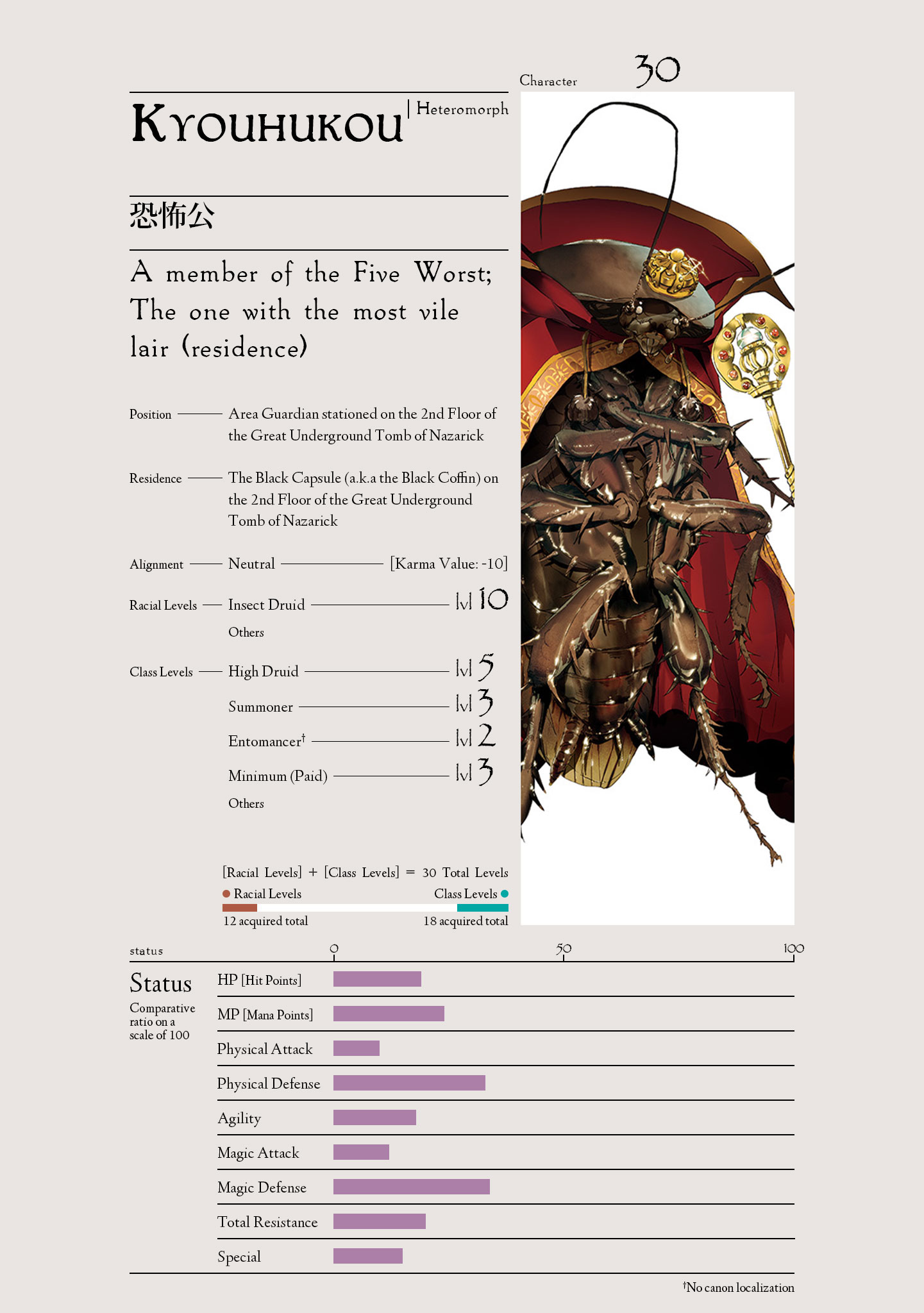
Then, the two of them laughed. They imagined the happy times that would

soon be upon them—

# OVERLORD

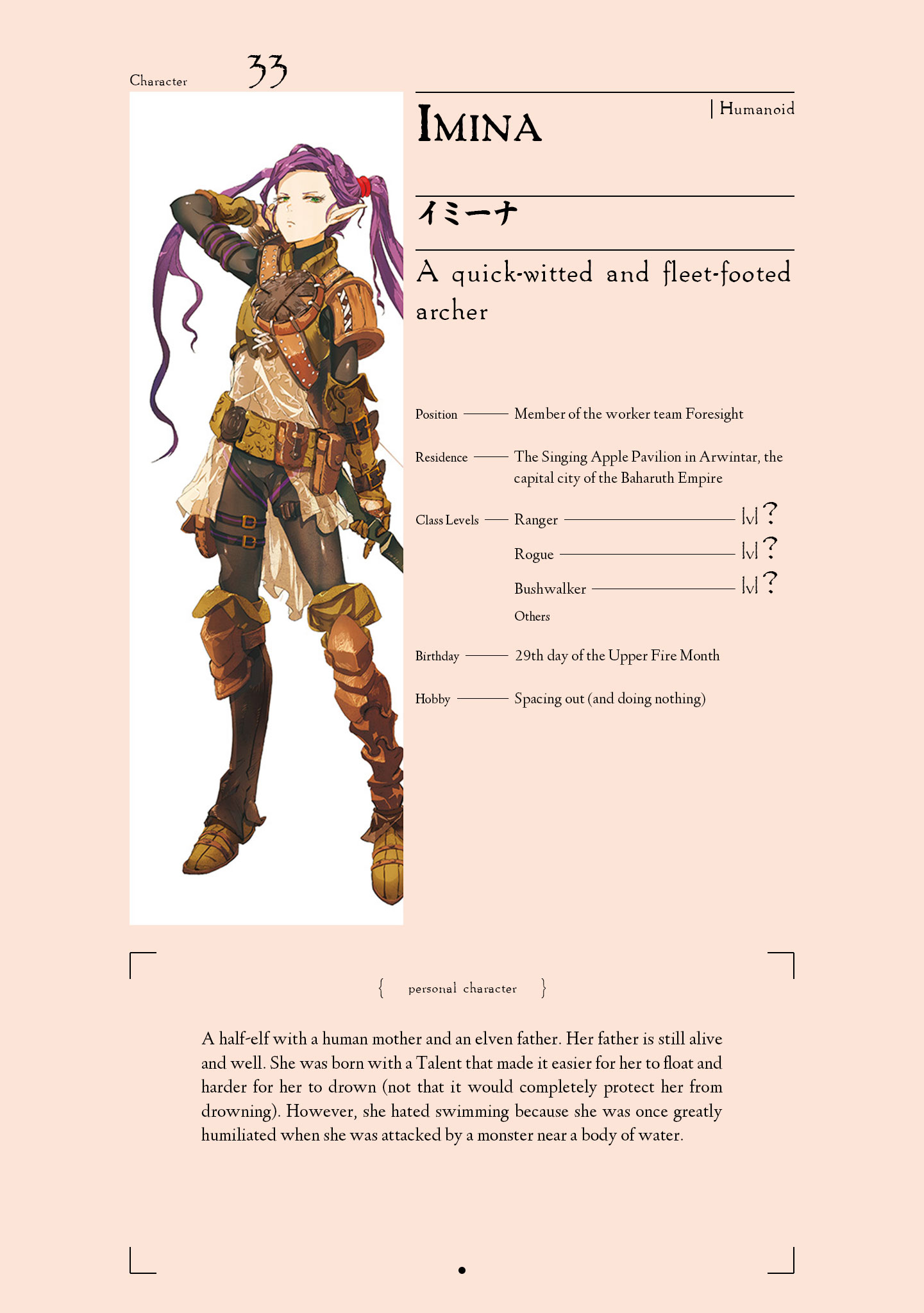
Character Profiles

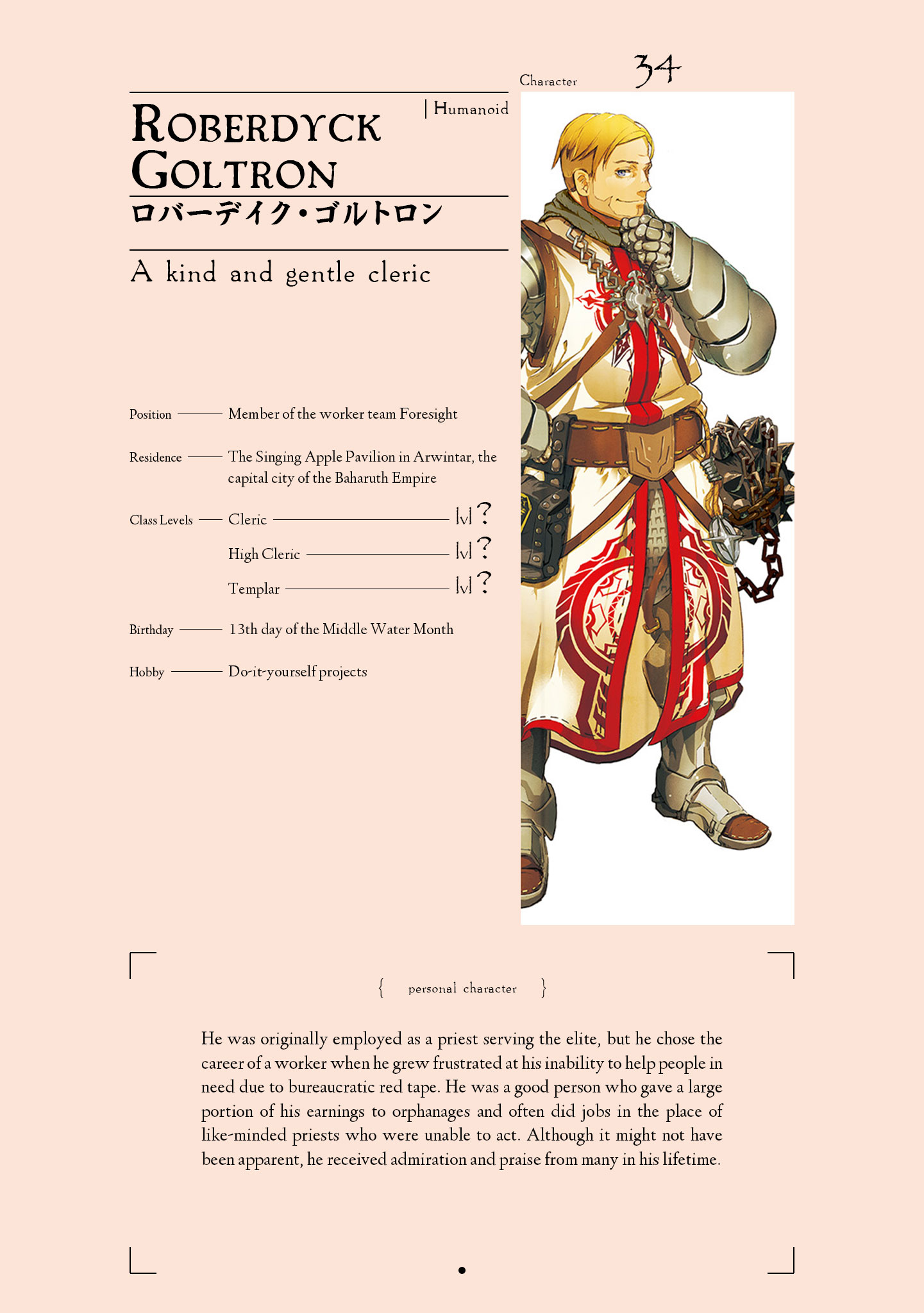












*Afterword*

# 

Seven months have passed since Volume 6 was published. Long time no see, I

am Maruyama.

By the time this volume is published, it will be the end of August, when

summer is at its peak. When Maruyama was young, I felt the heat receding when

September came along, but that isn’t so right now, it still feels hot even in mid-

September. Those are just my memories from when I was young, it would be

strange if nothing had changed at all.

Thanks to the extra layer of clothing Maruyama wears compared to normal

people, known as fat, I once again affirm that I hate summer. I spend most of my

time in an air-conditioned room in order to cool the computers down, but I still

sweat a lot when I travel to my company. The smell of my swear overwhelms my

cologne; this is terrible.

That’s how hot it is. Will the people who see the obi[5] on the book shout

“Fuwah!” in amazement? They might think, *this must be an illusion caused by the*

*heat of the summer* or something.

However, this is the truth!

Even Maruyama shrieked “Are you for real!” as the project progressed.

Overlord is getting an anime!!

I will work hard in order to produce good work; please look forward to it!

Now then, I will endure my stomach pain as I express my gratitude.

This time round, it is an honor for the history of light novels to have So-bin-

sama provide his unbelievable book illustrations. You really did your best. That’s

how Maruyama feels, and I’m sure the readers are grateful too! Let’s eat out

together next time! To Chord Design Studio-sama, thank you very much for

doing the design as always. To the proofreader Ōsako-sama, thank you for your

1. 5. 帯 (obi), a strip of paper looped around a book mainly used for promotional purposes.

pointers as always.

Also, thanks to the editor, F-da-sama, who firmly corrected the half-hearted

Maruyama and recommended Kyouhukou for the illustrations without

hesitation. Please don’t push yourself and work in moderation.

Thank you very much, everyone who assisted in the production of Overlord.

In addition, thank you for everything you’ve done, Honey.

And finally, thank you dear readers for purchasing my book!

## 

## 

## Kugane Maruyama

August 2014



*Information*

# 

**Source Text:** Skythewood Translations

**Additional Editing:** cortz & firedragon1x

**Version:** 2.3 (061021)