

Chapter 4

Western Turmoil

Demon Lord Leon left to meet with a difficult character, a woman with flowing silver hair and a distinctive pair of long, pointy ears. She sank deeply into a luxurious chair, beautiful like a scene straight out of a painting. She was a high elf and the gorgeous Emperor of the Sorcerer’s Dynasty Sarion—Elmesia El-Ru Sarion.

The two of them sat facing each other under the gazebo set in a breathtaking garden. A faint trail of steam drifted from the teacup that had just been served, and its rich fragrance was relaxing. Maids waited by the side to refill the tea before it got cold. The two silently observed each other for a while.

Elmesia spoke first. “As always, you are a man of few words, Leon-kun. It’s been so long since you visited me; it’s gonna be quite boring if you continue being like that.”

Her tone was rather intimate. It was only natural, since Elmesia and Leon had known each other for an extensive period of time. Not only were they close as rulers and important business partners, but as friends as well. The fact that Leon was permitted to enter this venue showed a glimpse of the level of their friendship. He was already acquainted with Elmesia even before he became a demon lord. At the time, Leon was still called a Hero and had operated within this land—within the boundaries of Sarion. The two had been friends ever since.

“I wouldn’t smile considering the predicament I’m in,” Leon said.

“But I seldom see you smile as is.”

“Does that really matter? I don’t have the time for it. We should cut to the chase—”

“Ah, right, right, I got some desserts from Yoshida-san’s shop, do you want some?” Elmesia offered, interrupting Leon. As if on cue, her servants pulled up the dining cart and began promptly serving the cakes.

“I’m not a fan of sweets.”

“Hmm—but this is soooo delicious. Ah, the cookie seems to have tea leaves blended in. It’s not that sweet. I heard they called this a matcha cookie.”

“—Fine, I’ll eat then.”

It’s no use arguing with Elmesia, Leon judged based on his own experience. The same could be said for Demon Lord Ramiris. Leon felt that all these difficult characters had a common trait: they were all woefully stubborn. And as a result, Leon had given up on them a long time ago. Suppressing the anxiety welling within, he gingerly reached out for a cookie.

“So sweet…”

“Ara? Is that still too sweet for you?”

“No, it’s not too bad.”

“Ho—you really aren’t the straightforward type. Anyway, it doesn’t matter. What brings you here today? Are you going to ask me whether or not I’ve seen some kids in Demon Lord Rimuru’s kingdom?” Elmesia guessed.

Leon was relieved. She’s just like always. I can never let my guard down against this woman. Has she already gotten hold of my situation?

With that being said, this conversation would go a lot faster. Leon adjusted his approach immediately.

“Yes. Demon Lord Rimuru seems to have a rather strong opinion about me. It’s likely because one of my previous subordinates came into contact with him and got something into his head.”

“I am aware. Shizue Izawa, was it? That champion nicknamed ‘The Conqueror of Flames.’ She is even quite famous in this country.”

“How did you know? My relationship with Shizu should have been highly classified—”

“Oops, how about we get to the real business? Aren’t you short on time?”

Leon felt a little irritated.

And who do you think is wasting my precious time? He wanted to shout at Elmesia but managed to hold back. Leon decided to cut to the chase.

“Right, then, I suppose. I’ve been planning to send an invitation to Rimuru in the near future. I want to resolve our misunderstanding. Moreover, antagonizing that guy would be way too dangerous.”

It was quite rare for Leon to be dragged around the ear like this. He could hold his own in conversation even while confronting Guy, yet he was hopeless against Elmesia.

“Ara? If it’s you, surely you would be able to win against Rimuru, no?” Elmesia asked Leon almost teasingly.

But Leon wasn’t so easily provoked, either.

“It’s not a matter of whether I can win or not; it’s meaningless to antagonize him. There isn’t any benefit to it, and on the contrary, there are way too many downsides.”

Haven’t you come to the same conclusion?—Leon conveyed with a sharp glance.

To that, Elmesia agreed, “I suppose. Moreover, forging an alliance with him would be greatly beneficial. Even though I fear the possibility that he would change his mind, I still decided to move forward with the alliance anyways.”

Leon, naturally, would be inclined to see things the same way. He’d guessed that Elmesia would make a judgement along those lines.

“Indeed. I personally would welcome a negotiable demon lord. Considering Rimuru, when compared to the other demon lords—or rather, when compared to the former demon lords Karion and Frey—he’s a better candidate to ally with. However, there is one problem—”

“You mean what you’ve been doing all this time?”

“……”

No—While that’s what Leon wanted to say, considering his current circumstances, he couldn’t deny it. In reality, Leon indeed had treated Shizu poorly, which led to this rocky relationship with Rimuru.

“Fine, it doesn’t matter,” Elmesia continued. “I will make my move on the matter soon. If Tempest were to start a war with El Dorado, we would be very troubled, too. By the way, you were going to ask me about the children, right? I did see them. They seemed to be enjoying themselves during the festival.”

“Is this true? Then—”

“Ara ara, one step at a time now. Mmh, this cake is sooooo delicious!”

Leon almost lost his usual calm demeanor.

That’s why I didn’t want to come here, Leon cursed internally. But now wasn’t the time for that.

“Well then, among the children, was there a young girl called Chloe?”

Asking straight on was a very risky move. Leon had always been very cautious, not knowing whether Elmesia would betray him or not. He always avoided doing things that could expose Chloe to danger. However, Leon also treated Elmesia as a friend. Under these dire circumstances, he didn’t want to hold back. With all that in mind, Leon decided to reveal his secret.

“Have you finally decided to trust me? Very well, Demon Lord Leon, since you are willing to believe me, I shall generously offer you a helping hand,” Elmesia announced to Leon, suddenly changing her demeanor.

And so, the two began to exchange their information.

There were five children under the protection of Demon Lord Rimuru: Kenya Misaki, Ryota Sekiguchi, Gail Gibson, Alice Rondo, and finally—Chloe Aubert. The name of the girl Leon had been searching for all his life.

“—Did you know this from the start?”

“You’re always a man of few words. Aren’t you afraid that people may misunderstand you? You always keep your thoughts to yourself and expect to carry all the responsibilities on your own. Isn’t this why even the champion Shizue Izawa never trusted you, ex-Hero-san?”

Had Leon been willing to be more genuine with Shizu, the relationship between the two may have been very different.

Elmesia was being sarcastic about it. In truth, she knew Leon had a kind heart, but knowing this was why she couldn’t stand how he had become a fearful demon lord of this world.

“Hmph,” Leon replied, “quit with the boring speculation. I’ve sacrificed a ton—a shit ton of people for my own sake. If I can save her, I don’t give a shit what method I use. I’ll take any blame that comes with it.”

That was Leon’s genuine thought. This man used to be the Hero who protected humanity. When he realized kind deeds would no longer achieve his goals, he was willing to bloody his hands to get the job done. At that point it was too late to just sweep it under the rug. He didn’t say these things as an excuse for his actions, it was simply what Leon lived by, his belief.

“You are as stubborn as a mule. Even Chloe-chan would dislike you being like this.”

“Shut up already. Then, does Rimuru do a good job caring for the kids? If so, it seems like there’s some dipshit who wants to lure me out for whatever scheme they have.”

“‘Is it the Rossos, or maybe Cerberus? I even have my suspicions on Demon Lord Luminas’—isn’t that what you are worried about, Leon-kun?”

“Just how much do you know?” Leon muttered, feeling powerless and utterly baffled. Reconfirming the massive intelligence network Elmesia possessed, he felt it was right to have asked for her help. He genuinely thought Elmesia was terrifying, not in terms of her combat ability, but her political strength. Indeed, anyone who could push Leon against the wall was no mere simpleton.

“Right then, I’ll stop teasing you. According to my investigation, Tempest and Lubelius are free from strife. Demon Lord Luminas ostensibly decided to abide by the treaty she made with Demon Lord Rimuru in earnest. That is readily apparent by observing the actions of Holy Knight Commander Hinata. However, it is a lot harder to judge on the side of Cerberus. That organization is a complete mystery, and the higher-ups of it never really worked hand-in-hand either. They seem to have deliberately created this impression for outsiders, so the information I could get from within the organization was limited. Let’s reserve our opinion on the matter for now. On the other hand, the Rosso family is certainly bad news. I heard that they’ve deployed all their reserve forces in the north to plan a secret assault on Lubelius. Even the agents of the Foreign Intelligence Agency of Siltrosso have all come out in full force. The whole area has been in a state of unrest because of it.”

The defenses of the Northern countries were stretched thin, and Lubelius faced a war at their doorstep. These were the two major locations Elmesia pointed out. However, the information she just gave Leon had the potential to stir up great amounts of trouble.

“Then Guy would move out.”

That being the problem in question. To be more precise, Demon Lord Guy wouldn’t move out, however, every one of his subordinates under the sun would rampage. If Guy were to move out personally, no matter who confronted him, the world would likely be destroyed.

Elmesia knew this all too well herself. But even if it were just his subordinates, it would still present a major crisis for humanity. The simple reason being that among Guy’s subordinates were the Green and Blue Primordials.

“Indeed. This problem has just gotten a bit too scary. If no one were to go and stop Guy’s subordinates, the Western Nations may be destroyed.”

Elmesia gazed at Leon, looking particularly troubled.

“Oi, I—!”

“Leon-kun, you’re back to speaking in your old tone like from before, aren’t you?”

“Uh, I was just…”

“You don’t have to act tough and play cool all the time. It’s so cute when you do something like this, but I don’t have the time to tease you right now.”

She even teased him during times like these. Leon was truly amazed by how easy-going Elmesia was.

“Sorry, I’m simply fixed on my goal. I’d like to negotiate with Guy, but that guy’s got a bad temper. If I intervene without careful planning, it may cause the opposite effect.”

“I understand. If we don’t show him that we would fight back with our own strength, that demon lord would likely lose interest in humanity. Right now, the Holy Knight Order is in a bind, so I have no choice but to send the Magus to reinforce the guards of the Northern realm. You can also hop on our dragon ship to get you to Lubelius.”

“…Can I really?”

“Of course, didn’t I tell you to take your time? Now then, you are on a clock, right? Hurry up and get going.”

The situation was more dire than Leon had imagined. Despite how strong he was, he could not teleport to somewhere he had never been before. Moreover, Lubelius was protected by a barrier. If he were to head to Lubelius now, air transport was probably the fastest.

Leon gratefully accepted Elmesia’s proposal with a, “Sorry for the trouble.”

“If only you were always so straightforward. Right right, I think this goes without saying, but Cerberus definitely wanted to drag you into all this. It’s one hundred percent a trap!”

To Elmesia’s warning, Leon replied with two words: “I know.”

Elmesia answered, “I figured as much,” with a tinge of sadness in her smile.

Leon was just like this in the past. Never showing weakness in front of anyone, aiming to achieve his goal no matter what got in his way. That young man had an unbreakable will. He lived his life like a true Hero. It was the same when he became a demon lord.

And he’s just as clumsy. Nothing has changed since back then…

Elmesia had conflicted feelings about him.

Before boarding the dragon ship, Leon suddenly recalled a warning he meant to relay to Elmesia. Turning towards her, he said: “Consider this a token of gratitude from me. The Yellow Primordial has disappeared. So be careful yourself.”

“Huh?!” Elmesia blurted in shock.

Leon cracked up seeing the look on her face.

“Wasn’t your hobby collecting information? Looks like you didn’t know that. I’m happy though, as it seems like I was of some help to you.”

Leaving these words, Leon savored the taste of victory as he left.

After Leon departed—

“This can’t be true, right? Three primordials, and it had to happen when half of the Magus was out. What the hell have I gotten myself into… But, had it not been the case, Leon-kun likely would not have acted either. I guess I still have to sharpen my observational skills…”

Everyone just does as they please—Elmesia thought to herself, holding her head in her hands.

It was a sunny morning. Relishing the warm breeze, I felt it would be a wonderful day. However, my prediction turned out—

“Th-this is a disaster! Someone has broken into the Grand Cathedral and currently being fought against—!” a novice Holy Knight-san barged in, panicked.

My prediction was way off.

“Calm down. How many men do the enemies have; how many casualties have we sustained?”

Hinata was having breakfast with me. Her reaction was extraordinarily calm. Seeing her like this made me realize again that it’d be horrifying going against her.

“Yes ma’am! Enemy numbers are unknown, however, it’s certain that it is close to a hundred men. They’re at least as strong as rank B-plus. Seeing how they were acting, they know the layout of our nation very well.”

Nearly a hundred B-plus ranked soldiers were a force to be reckoned with. He also mentioned that they were familiar with the layout of the city—they were most likely Granbell’s men.

“—Regarding casualties, several novice knights were injured. There have been several deaths and wounded among the Pope’s Imperial Guards. Fortunately, no civilians have been harmed,” the envoy answered swiftly, describing heavy losses.

Had this happened in my nation, I would have lost my mind (again). But since I was a guest here, it would be best that I stayed out of other people’s business. That sounded quite cold, but this wasn’t my country to run.

“Is that so? Then our enemy must be the head of the Seven Luminaries, Sun Priest Gran and the Rosso family under his command. We must not underestimate these enemies, I’m sure their combat strength is far greater than they let on. Inform the Holy Knights awaiting orders to prepare for a full-scale assault.”

The enemies reportedly sustained a number of casualties too, a lot more than Lubelius. However, Hinata did not dare lower her guard.

That’s the Hinata I know, I thought to myself, and impressed as I was, I asked the burning question that was on my mind this whole time.

“By the way, you mentioned it happened in the Grand Cathedral, is that the place where we set up all the instruments?”

If that were the case, we would have a big problem.

Yesterday, the band members set up their instruments at this Grand Cathedral and did a rehearsal. I figured that there weren’t exactly a lot of Grand Cathedrals in the nation, so I had a bad feeling about this. And yet it was in times like these that my prediction—

“There is no other facility called the Grand Cathedral except for that.”

—Tended to come true…

I mean, it was infallible.

How annoying, I thought to myself as I turned to Diablo.

His smile was unfazed, indicating “No problem” to me. Diablo seemed to be contacting Venom through ‘Telepathy Net’ as soon as the envoy had arrived. Truly competent in every sense of the word.

Venom’s response was perfectly prompt as well. The members of the band were already inside the Grand Cathedral; however, the defenses around them were flawless. No suspicious individuals had been able to approach them, and they carried on their final rehearsal, as planned.

“With all hell breaking loose around them, those guys sure are bold.”

“Kufufufufu, that’s only natural. If they couldn’t even handle something this trivial, they wouldn’t be qualified to be my subordinates.”

This man’s confidence was something I could only hope to attain.

“Never mind that, let’s not idle here and head to the Grand Cathedral at once,” I said with a pretentious air.

I opened a portal to the cathedral using ‘Spatial Domination.’ I had gotten pretty good at using it, so even when I was here—inside Lubelius, which was protected by a holy barrier—I could still use it without a hitch. It was probably because they didn’t put up barriers that would prevent teleportation inside.

“—Phew, I don’t even have the energy to mock you anymore, just take me there too,” Hinata-san said, looking exhausted.

Why are you so tired this early in the morning? Although I felt like I’d get scolded for saying so, possibly even considered a creep, so I decided to just keep quiet. I wanted to make strides in improving myself too and outlive the days of being called an air-head.

A man named Nicolaus came along as well. The fact that he was preparing breakfast for us led me to believe that he was a servant at first. As it turned out, he was the high cardinal of the Western Holy Church. He was wearing some sort of a high-class robe beneath his apron, so this guy was legit. But why was such a big shot character serving Hinata? I felt that there were more and more mysteries as we spoke.

—Uh, but they probably weren’t that important.

The children were in the Grand Cathedral as well. They were very energetic this morning, so I let them go first. Even though the defenses were thorough, this world was full of surprises and I had no way to predict what might happen. I adjusted my mood a bit and headed to the Grand Cathedral in a hurry.

A cacophony of intense fights could be heard outside when I arrived in the Grand Cathedral, and quickly spotted the frightened band members.

At that moment, Shion raised her voice and shouted, “Don’t worry! Have you all forgotten what Rimuru-sama said? He said he would guarantee your safety, that you shouldn’t worry and should just focus on your performance. Didn’t Rimuru-sama say that? Yet you guys are not continuing your practice, how is that fair?”

Eh…can’t you cut them some slack?

Shion-san, have you not realized this is a battlefield? Telling the non-combatant members of the band to not be afraid, no matter how I see it, that’s too harsh—

“Shion-sama, my apologies, looks like I was panicking a bit.”

—Eh?

Takt, after being scolded by Shion, regained his composure out of nowhere. He turned his eyes to the band members and raised his conductor baton.

They seemed to have noticed my presence as their eyes found me. Not sure if that was the reason or not, but the band members were seemingly at ease and calm again. There were even smiles on everyone’s faces.

“Then let’s get back to practice!”

It looked like Takt wasn’t worried at all whether the other members would object or not. He began to practice again; the rest of the members followed almost as if nothing had happened. And then, with fine coordination, beautiful notes of music began to fill the air. It was a powerful and intense performance which overshadowed even the sound of the fighting. I couldn’t help but feel proud of the band members. Fighting with a score in the background; it almost felt like a stage drama.

But it went without saying that this was authentic combat.

I found the children and told them not to run around.

“You have me here arinsu?”

Kumara was filled with fighting spirit, but I told her to calm down. Right now, Kumara only had one tail, so she was by herself. She was just like the kids; it was too soon for them to engage in actual combat.

I ordered Shion and Diablo to protect the children together.

“What does Rimuru-sama plan to do?”

“Me? I’m gonna get rid of the troublemakers. Hinata and her men seem to be fighting against the guys behind all the plots, so I’m going to help kick them out.”

Even though we were guests here and shouldn’t intervene, seeing how hard-working the band was, I wished to ensure the success of the concert tomorrow.

“—Understood.”

“Hmm?” Shion looked at Diablo in shock. “Second Secretary, what happened? You actually obeyed Rimuru-sama’s order, that’s surprising.”

Umm, I’m quite surprised myself.

I thought Diablo would say that he was coming with me. That said, this would be better since it would avoid spreading the commotion.

“I’ll be counting on you guys here then!”

“Very well, may you triumph in battle,” Diablo cheered.

“Ah…” Shion seemed to want to object but wasn’t able to say anything in front of Diablo’s face.

Seeing this as an opportunity, I turned a blind eye and headed straight into the battlefield.

The fighting was chaotic at the entrance of the Grand Cathedral. The entire gate was wrecked with nothing left. There were over a hundred people fighting. The most eye-catching part of the fight was the person that Hinata was confronting.

It was an old grandpa, yet his back was ramrod straight and maintained a beautiful stance. He was wearing what seemed to be a very fancy suit. His eyes were sharp and had an aura that showed he was no average person. He was neither monster, nor human. Seeing the dominating aura coming off him, I could tell he bore unusual power.

“Who is that man?”

“Granbell Rosso. That old man is the head of the Five Great Elders, leader of the Rosso family.”

“So that’s who he is…”

I suddenly realized upon hearing the explanation.

“Maria, go find Luminas-sama and bring her here. If she resists, it’s fine to kill her.”

In response to Granbell’s words, a woman came out. Her appearance was reminiscent of Mariabell, a woman in her prime. The two seemed to be related by blood, but I’m not sure whether they were mother and daughter.

«Answer. Based on genetic analysis, there is no evidence of them being blood related.»

How can you tell that just by looking… Never mind.

If it weren’t coincidence that she looked so much like Mariabell, the problem would be how strong this woman called Maria was. She didn’t look strong enough to fight against Luminas; was Granbell serious with his command?

“Understood. Executing order.”

This woman called Maria didn’t even turn her head at us before leaving straightaway. Her reaction was very robotic, and it was obvious that she was different from a normal human being. I wasn’t sure whether she really was as strong as it seemed, but I figured Luminas would be the one to test that.

I just wanted Granbell to leave soon. If we could end this with just a conversation, then it’d be fine. But if I couldn’t convince him, I’d take care of him quickly.

“Granbell-san, nice to meet you, I am Demon Lord Rimuru.” You gotta start a conversation with a greeting. It was hard to build a good relationship at this point, but I still approached in a friendly tone.

“So you are Demon Lord Rimuru? How dare you kill my Mariabell…”

“Oi oi oi, it was you guys who—”

Ah, I see; I was indeed getting flack as well. But Mariabell’s death was purely an accident, and it didn’t seem right to blame it on me. Yet if I told him that I didn’t mean to kill Mariabell, it would probably sound like an excuse. To be fair, had Mariabell not picked on me, it would never have happened.

With that being said, Granbell probably wouldn’t hear me out. Yuuki likely already got to him. At this point, I knew the guy was deceitful, so I could imagine what he would say about me. This was no time for us to negotiate and make peace.

«Report. Deduced that either way, the two sides are incompatible.»

All right, that was the case.

Mariabell was one such example, and I thought this Granbell would be hard to coexist with as well. If that was the case, then I could only use strength to make him yield.

“—Will it even work trying to explain this to you? Let’s use strength to decide which side is right!”

“Kukuku, you talk tough. But by the looks of it, you are nothing more than a newbie demon lord, do you think you can win against me? I’ll take care of you later, meanwhile just stay put there and watch your friends get beaten down.”

Did he seriously just call me a newbie demon lord?

Wasn’t he Luminas’s subordinate? This man had quite the ego. Right, I supposed he had a point. A monster’s strength varied depending on the amount of time they had lived…but shouldn’t you at least be a bit cautious against a demon lord? I guess this grandpa was a lot more conceited than I expected.

Some people ran out to challenge Granbell.

“There is no need for Hinata-sama and Demon Lord Rimuru-dono to strike. Head Priest Gran, we shall be your opponents!” Nicolaus shouted.

Wasn’t he some big shot higher-up—ah, now I remember. Cardinal Nicolaus was the one who set the trap to capture Granbell and used ‘Disintegration’ on him. No wonder why he was self-assured.

Someone responded to Nicolaus’s call; it was the three captains of the Holy Knight Order. They were Vice Commander Leonard, Captain Arnaud, and Ritase. Fritz and Bacchus were currently away, training in the labyrinth. Had I known that something like this would happen—ah, I forgot that I wasn’t one to be dishing out judgement here.

“Hinata-sama, please sit tight and watch me in action!” With Nicolaus’s order, Leonard sprang into action. In addition, Arnaud and Ritase began assaulting Granbell at the same time. Were the three captains buying time for Nicolaus to cast the deadly ‘Disintegration’?

This attack plan seemed a bit over the top, but that probably just meant that Nicolaus was on maximum alert against Granbell.

Leonard was using his elegant sword arts to distract Granbell. Arnaud understood right away and cooperated with Leonard’s strikes. Ritase was on the side, providing support for the two.

Under normal circumstances, with these three coordinating attacks, it’d be a guaranteed victory. Yet when pitted against Granbell, he seemed to be handling it all with ease. What’s worse was that Granbell seemed uninterested in interrupting Nicolaus’s chanting, and instead, used smooth and almost ballet-like strikes against the three. There was not a shred of panic on his face. He barely broke a sweat taking on the three’s attacks.

He is on a completely different level—I thought to myself.

Nicolaus’s chanting had entered its final verse. He used the chanting to interfere with the physical world and expanded layers of magic circles. Trapped in a prison of light formed by magic circles and mantra, Granbell remained completely unfazed.

When the casting of ‘Disintegration’ was complete, there was no way anyone could defend against the beam of light. The beam would shatter even the soul of the target at lightning speed.

Or at least, this was how it should have worked.

Yet this common sense was shattered.

“Mmmh, very fine chanting. Perhaps this is the best example of one’s understanding of the flow of magic.” Granbell said in an incredibly cruel tone. The arrogance in his tone sounded like something a teacher would say to a student.

And then—

Hearing his words, Hinata’s face turned pale as she muttered, “Could it be…” She seemed to have realized something but wasn’t quick enough to inform Nicolaus.

“Die! Disintegration!”

A beam of light flashed and went straight for Granbell—but to everyone’s surprise, its trajectory changed and was absorbed by the sword in Granbell’s hand.

It happened all too fast. Even with senses accelerated to a million times greater than normal, one would still have a hard time capturing this detail.

Yet I knew. I knew full well what had just happened… Because I had seen that same exact technique used before. It was the ultimate holy sword art, ‘Melt Slash’—the strongest technique developed by Hinata.

“—Everyone, spread out!”

Heeding Hinata’s order, the combatants reacted quickly. The swiftness of their actions did not dishonor their titles, yet they were still too slow. Granbell struck with ‘Melt Slash.’ This act alone sent out a fan-like shockwave.

Hinata dashed out at that instant and blocked Granbell’s sword in front of him. Her movement was impressively fast, but that alone was not enough to block Granbell’s attack entirely.

Hinata took the ‘Melt Slash’ head-on and was sent flying into Nicolaus. She was fine herself, but Nicolaus sustained heavy injuries. Had Hinata’s sword not been the legendary-grade moonlight rapier, both of them would have been obliterated.

The three captains were sent flying away by the shockwave as well and had been lying on the ground since. It looked like that hit knocked them all out.

“Are…are you guys all right?!” Hinata shouted.

It went without saying that no one responded.

Hinata glared at Granbell while some anxiety showed on her face. Even the usually calm and composed Hinata didn’t expect Granbell to be so strong.

The one to answer her question was Granbell, who was meant to be her opponent.

“Huh, it seems that I didn’t manage to kill anyone. Looks like my skill has weakened over the years. You should thank that demon lord too.”

“What? What are you talking about…”

Hinata turned her eyes to me and regained her cool upon realizing something.

“I see, it was you who saved us. Thanks a lot, Rimuru.”

You’re welcome—I nodded slightly to Hinata.

Indeed, it was thanks to my help that the captains were only knocked out. When I realized what was coming, I activated ‘Absolute Defense.’ Otherwise, the three would probably have been obliterated. I thought that I could block the attack perfectly, but that turned out to be wishful thinking.

The ‘Absolute Defense’ of Ultimate Skill ‘Covenant King Uriel’ could block any attack. Although, there were exceptions; for instance, Yuuki’s ‘Anti-Skill.’ I couldn’t get overly dependent on it, though its defensive properties were high enough to be trusted. However, even when it was a perfect Skill to use on myself, when applied to someone else—in fact, multiple other people—its precision took a hit.

For me, it was okay even if some attacks landed, since I had my ‘Infinite Regeneration.’ Any injuries would be quickly regenerated, meaning I could achieve perfect defense.

But it was different for the three captains. This small amount of shockwave that slipped through my ‘Absolute Defense’ sent them to death’s doorstep. It was an extremely close call.

“I never expected anyone other than me to master ‘Melt Slash.’ That was surprising.”

“Heh, what an arrogant thought, Hinata. With enough time and practice, many can reach your level.”

I mean, I could use it too.

Although it was thanks to Raphael-san’s liberal use of ‘Analyze and Assess.’ By the way, the condition for utilizing ‘Melt Slash’ was to first master ‘Disintegration.’ If there truly were several people who managed to reach that level, then I would have to be impressed by humanity.

Actually, now that I thought about it carefully, there was indeed a possibility. There was the Hero who managed to seal Veldora. Therefore, there was nothing strange about the existence of powerful humans. Now that I had become a demon lord, it was best that I watch my back around them.

But now wasn’t the time to have idle thoughts.

“And to the Holy Knight captains: you are a bit too useless, ending up on the verge of death after that weak of an attack. In any case, you guys cannot even begin to compare to the master swordsmen of the past, much less stand against me,” Granbell proclaimed, sounding like he was convinced about his words. In essence, he declared in front of Hinata that she wasn’t on his level.

“What a pathetic joke. I’ll trouble you to be my opponent now,” Hinata sneered in reply.

Apparently, she’d gotten serious as well. I wouldn’t have a chance to take the stage—or so I thought, but I was once again caught up in wishful thinking.

A huge explosion went off inside the Grand Cathedral.

“Is that Razul? I ordered him to destroy the Grand Cathedral, and it looks like he’s doing it rather flamboyantly.”

“What? You bastard…”

The children and the band members were all inside the Grand Cathedral. Even though I ordered Shion, Diablo, and the other guards there, if they were to start fighting inside, some people may be affected as a result. I wanted to take care of Granbell as soon as possible, and to do that I’d need to get rid of these hindering enemies first.

After settling on the idea, I decided to ‘Teleport’ back to the Grand Cathedral.

Yet I was interrupted by Granbell, “Demon Lord Rimuru, these people shall be your opponents. Some of them may be your countrymen, but do enjoy yourself now.”

Several individuals under Granbell’s command showed up.

The word “countrymen” was a bit too worrying; I immediately caught on what he had meant. Their ages varied and consisted of different ethnicities too. At first, the composition seemed to be disorganized, but they all shared one common point in core, and that was that every single one of them possessed a magicule content far exceeding the average person’s.

“Otherworlders, huh? I see, no wonder some of them may be Japanese like me as well.”

Uh, there’s no time to idle around—since more than ten otherworlders were charging at me simultaneously. It looked like they were controlled by a curse like Glenda. Even their free will seemed to have been deprived. Under this state, even if I were to break their curse, they probably wouldn’t stop, either.

But…

“Kukuku, do you truly intend to fight them? These people are only being manipulated by me, you know?”

What a cunning man.

He told me this deliberately, probably thinking it would keep me from making a move. While I didn’t want to give up like this, I had to admit that it was a very effective method.

“I heard that you go soft very easily. Are you hesitant to extend your killing hand to the innocent? Or will you see this as warfare and choose to defend yourself? Either way is fine.”

Granbell merely considered the summoned otherworlders as his weapons. In truth, they were just like simple consumable items to him. Even if I were to kill them all, he would probably act just like how he proclaimed, completely untroubled. What a very difficult opponent. He had done some extensive research on me.

If he were to run into people like Diablo or Shion, they would have cleaned house without hesitation. Considering from that perspective, I wasn’t sure if it was good or bad that the one facing these enemies was me.

“Ahhh, dammit! So troublesome—!”

There was no time for complaints. If I didn’t act fast enough, the children would be in danger, and the casualties would increase too.

At this point, there was only one way out. It was complicated, but I could manage—dispelling their curse one by one and knocking them out non-lethally.

With that, I was roped into battle as well.

A fellow Japanese person launched an attack at me.

Some of these otherworlders might actually not be from Earth; was it possible that they came from some other planet or dimension? Perhaps these thoughts indicated that I’d regained some of my cool.

Otherworlders had very strong constitutions, and they may possess some unknown special abilities. It went without saying that they were dangerous, but they posed no threat against me right now. Even if I were completely unguarded, they wouldn’t have been able to harm me, even if they sent that Glenda. That’s just how overpowered when ‘Absolute Defense’ was combined with ‘Infinite Regeneration.’

While they were difficult to handle, they were just that. I could probably manage to paralyze them all given some time, and without harming them during the process. I wasn’t underestimating my enemies; this was just my genuine thought. After all, I had Wisdom King Raphael-san. I wouldn’t have the chance to underestimate my enemies.

Considering this, I invested a part of its impressive calculation power to observe my surroundings.

First was Hinata who was fighting not far from me. Granbell wasn’t talking anymore, but was locked in an elegant sword fight against her. Just like Hinata, he was only using a rapier. His right hand held the sword while his left hand was held behind his back. It seemed like he would only use his left hand when casting magic.

“Tsk, have you been holding back your power as the Master of Sun? I recall that you were known to be best at fighting with bare hands in close quarters, turns out your swordsmanship was masterful as well.”

“Hehe! I have mastered all weapons. I merely did not need to use them in the past.”

“Ara, I see. Then allow me to wipe that casual look from your face.”

Hinata wasn’t holding back from the beginning. It was very obvious considering she was using her Moonlight Rapier. What was curious was Granbell’s sword. It was already unusual that he had a sword that could rival Hinata’s.

«Answer. Regarding the grade of the sword… Analysis failed due to interference. Deduced to be above legendary-grade.»

The analysis result was rather surprising. Lately, Raphael-san had been entirely reliable; I was rather taken aback by this turn of events. I might have underestimated Granbell a little too much.

I never expected it to come to this—could even Hinata lose to him?

No, that can’t be…

There was no way that could happen. However, the terrifying thing was that I couldn’t say for sure. Even Wisdom King Raphael-san couldn’t see through the abilities of the enemy.

While Hinata and Granbell’s duel was concerning, there was another fight that caught even more attention. There was some intense fighting taking place in the Grand Cathedral. I raised the precision of my ‘Magic Perception’ and focused on the situation.

There was a man in black armor. Shockingly, when faced with Shion and Diablo, he wasn’t even fazed. Ah, no wonder. This guy’s magicule content was more than Shion and Diablo’s combined.

“This is insane. Oi, what kind of a hidden trump card is that? He’s stronger than an average demon lord.”

“That’s only natural. In order to combat the army of demon lords and the monsters hostile to humanity, no amount of trump cards can be reassuring,” Granbell replied to my rambling.

I was surprised he even had the time to do that while fighting against Hinata. What an opportunity presented itself, since he had answered, that I might as well get more detailed information from him. It could also distract him, killing two birds with one stone.

“That guy seemed to be a lot stronger than the demon lord imposter Roy, but isn’t he stronger than you too?” I asked Granbell in a rather provoking tone.

“His name is Razul. A friend that I’ve known for thousands of years,” Granbell calmly answered.

Hinata did not speak. She probably had understood my intention and didn’t want to interfere. I continued with this plan.

“So you are friends. But Razul-san doesn’t look very human.”

“So what?”

I didn’t know what to say upon getting the question thrown back so abruptly. Even though I really wanted to figure out his true identity, learning that he was not human was a gain of sorts.

“No, it’s nothing…”

I seemed to have killed the conversation. I kinda regret my choices now.

“Razul is a race that enjoys longevity, my close companion during my prime. He’s a lot stronger than the Holy Knight captains, so your subordinates may have a hard time fighting him.”

Granbell was right. Shion and Diablo were indeed in a tough fight. And here I thought that there was no need to worry when Diablo was around, could that thought have been too naive as well?

No, the way he was fighting didn’t look right. For some reason, Diablo didn’t seem to be focused.

«Report. Unusual spatial distortion detected. This is an indication of someone using ‘Spatial Movement’—»

Raphael-san’s warning suddenly rang in my head.

Had it not been urgent, it wouldn’t have warned me. That’s why the situation must’ve been dire. If that was the case, I shouldn’t hold back either. Diablo probably noticed this anomaly too, that’s why he wasn’t concentrating on the fight.

‹Ranga, are you there?›

‹I’m here, Master!›

Got it!

He was sleeping in my shadow.

‹I want you to support Shion covertly!›

‹Understood!›

Ranga used ‘Shadow Step’ to stealthily enter Shion’s shadow.

Now that the preparation was complete, I gave my next order.

‹Diablo, was your mind on something else?›

‹My apologies, Rimuru-sama. To fall into a hard battle should be considered a misconduct of mine. In truth, this individual is far stronger than I expected. He is a rare insect type monster, and what’s more, he’s in his complete form. They are like a natural enemy to us demons.›

According to Diablo, the insect type monsters were magical beasts from a different dimension that possessed the power of spirits. They sometimes would show up in this world. It was extremely rare for one to evolve to humanoid form.

With that being the case, Diablo still had a chance to win, however, he had yet to defeat the enemy. In other words, the reason Diablo had been so concerned with was far worse than Razul. The thing that was distracting him had arrived through ‘Spatial Movement.’ I could only hope that Diablo would handle whatever it was.

‹Shion, you heard us. If Diablo is finding excuses, the situation must be dire.›

Upon saying so, I sensed Diablo’s guilt internally. He would never find excuses under normal circumstances, that’s why I could tell if he was hiding something right away.

In order for Diablo to move freely, I’d have Shion and Ranga hold the ground here.

‹Right now, Ranga is hiding in your shadow, I want you two to cooperate and beat that insect type monster—Razul.›

‹It goes without saying!›

‹I will not let down Master’s expectations!›

Shion also seemed to realize that Diablo was acting strange. Even if I hadn’t given the order, she would probably have done the same. However, for Shion alone to handle the powerful Razul, she would fall in crisis. It wasn’t that I lacked confidence in Shion, but rather that I wanted to find the safest solution possible. While two on one may be dishonorable, we should always fight with the hope of a one hundred percent chance of victory.

‹Diablo, go and handle what’s on your mind. Also, you should trust your companions more and learn to rely on them sometimes.›

‹—! Kufufufufufu, understood. Looks like I can be a little pretentious at times. Very well, I shall resolve the problem right away!›

Not just a little, too pretentious, to be honest. But at least this helped him get his usual pace back, how wonderful.

‹Then, let’s get moving!›

‹ ‹ ‹Understood!› › ›

I gave the order, rather out of practice, as the three replied in high spirits.

I just needed to believe they would bring me the best outcomes.

I focused my attention back on paralyzing the otherworlders.

“Kufufufufu, Rimuru-sama has seen right through me. He’s seriously unparalleled.”

“That goes without saying, Second Secretary. Don’t mind that for now, go and resolve what’s on your mind!”

“Of course. You must have noticed too, that man called Razul is stronger than you. Are you sure you will be all right, First Secretary-dono?”

“Fufufu, I never expected you to worry for me, Second Secretary—no, Diablo. I admit that you are strong, stronger than me. That’s why you need to defeat whatever enemy that stands before us to avoid trouble for Rimuru-sama! Isn’t that your duty?”

“—! Kufu, kufufufufufu, I never expected you call me by my ‘name’—”

“Get going! Leave the rest to me.”

“Even if Rimuru-sama didn’t give the order, I would still have faith in you from the bottom of my heart, Shion-dono.”

Shion shuddered. “Just call me Shion. Honorifics coming from your mouth give me the creeps. It sounds so disingenuous.”

“Kufufufufu, then Shion, I wish you victory in your conquest.”

“You too, Diablo.”

Shion and Diablo didn’t exchange any looks, but acknowledged each other with a few words. Both of them had very strong egos, but they had also recognized each other’s strength from the start.

Diablo walked away without even turning his head. He gave an order to his lieutenant coldly.

“Venom, even if you die, you need to—actually, it’s okay if you die, but you must protect these kids.”

Speaking of which, Rimuru’s order never included what to do with Diablo’s subordinates. Therefore, there wasn’t much to be worried about here.

The important things here are the children and the band members—Diablo judged calmly.

“Ah, yes sir.”

I honestly hoped he would care for us more—Venom thought. But he wasn’t dumb enough to say that out loud. If he had, he would probably have been taken out by Diablo before he could be killed by the enemies.

Moreover—

It’s fine, Shion-sama and Ranga-sama seem to be handling that tough guy. If it’s only protecting these people, even we would be more than sufficient. It’d be easier than fighting Diablo-sama—were Venom’s genuine thoughts.

“I wish you glory in your conquest, Diablo-sama!”

“Shut up, it’s pointless for you to worry.”

As Venom sent Diablo his regards, he was scolded coldly by Diablo.

Never mind, that’s just how our lord is…

A flashback of him being forced into subordination crossed Venom’s mind. He quickly shook off these thoughts. Had he run into Diablo looking all displeased like this, there’s no telling what would have happened. Venom changed his mood and focused on the mission.

Diablo, having entrusted the tasks to his companions, left the battlefield. He teleported at the precise location of his target. The place was a bit far from the Grand Cathedral, located in a wasteland outside Lubelius.

A blue-haired beauty in a dark red maid suit was there. Several Holy Knights laid by her feet. These supposed one-man armies of human guardians didn’t stand a chance against her.

“Long time no see, Noir, I was getting impatient since you’ve taken your time getting here.”

“I could feel such a fierce killing intent, it’s just that I couldn’t withdraw myself for a few minutes until now. By the way, please call me Diablo, Blue Primordial—excuse me, you’ve already gotten the name Raine.”

The blue-haired beauty, Raine, smiled with satisfaction to Diablo’s response.

“Indeed, the strongest among us primordials, Red Primordial, the great Guy-sama has given me the name; unlike the name given to you by some cheap shot demon lord of unknown origin.”

“Huh? Do you have a death wish? Actually, you are asking to disappear from this world, no? Kufufufufu, allow me to grant you your wish.”

While a smile still hung on his face, the smile in Diablo’s eyes dissipated completely. The red pupils of his golden eyes turned thin, locking Raine as his prey.

“Let’s go then, Diablo! Ah ah, how exciting. Ever since I learned that you fought against the White Primordial on the eastern continent, I wanted to duel you.”

“How boring. If you think you are qualified to fight against me, you are sorely mistaken.”

“Let’s confirm that after our battle!”

As she finished—actually, before she finished—Raine was on the move. Her knife-like hand was faster than the speed of sound. Yet, it was easily swatted away as Diablo raised a hand.

Raine rejoiced. She could finally put her body to use and fulfill her thousand-year wish.

Yes, this is it. I’d be really troubled if it were finished instantly. You were always too free-spirited, even though we are all primordials. No faction, no sense of duty, even when all demons craved a body, you sneered at the idea…

You could say that Raine was jealous of Diablo. The lifestyle that he had chosen was unbearable to Raine, who valued law and order. Moreover, Diablo also—

Unforgivable, he even reached a draw with Guy-sama. This idler who never sought to become stronger! The demon race should follow the natural order of things, acquiring a body and considering evolution as their goal!

In order to relieve her dissatisfaction with him for over thousands of years, Raine had gone all out as she closed in on Diablo.

Diablo—the Black Primordial Noir—was a special demon. During the ancient era far, far in the past, Rouge and Noir fought for the throne of the strongest. They ended up in a draw, yet what happened later to the two differed greatly. Rouge was brought to the physical world and acquired a body as well as immense power. However, Noir, almost as if he had denied evolution, remained unchanged over the years.

Blanc, Jaune, and Violet on the other hand, were under rather unavoidable circumstances. These three had always hindered each other’s evolutions. The three powerhouses were evenly matched amongst themselves, and that power balance was never broken.

The Black Primordial wasn’t limited by such things; however, he seemed to treat the other primordials like fools and found pleasure in going his own way. And so, tens and thousands of years passed.

This was why Raine couldn’t forgive Diablo. His contrarian, free-spirited, carefree lifestyle, as well as being recognized by the strongest primordial, Guy— Raine couldn’t stand all these things about Diablo.

“Ahahahaha! Just as you always say, running away all the time isn’t real combat. Looks like you are really only good at running away.”

“Kufufufufu, I will be straight with you, don’t get mistaken now. Against someone like you, I wouldn’t even need to use my full power. Moreover, I never intended to run away.”

“Gonna be a sore loser now, eh? I figure that you probably can’t use all your power with your newly acquired body. You know you can’t use that as an excuse.”

Raine began to launch magic missiles with her fists. The magic missile interfered with the world’s rules and was turned into the nuclear magic ‘Nuclear Cannon.’ Raine could cast magic without chanting.

However, Diablo had expected this too. He calmly dispelled all the vicious nuclear magic strikes. Layers and layers of magic barriers and counter-attack techniques were applied. They each tried to break through the other’s defenses and land a fatal shot. This was how high-level demons fought against each other. There wasn’t any time wasted on chanting, both of them put forth extremely masterful spells.

As time passed—

“U-unbelievable! D-did you manage to draw that while fighting with me?”

“Indeed, Raine. Fighting you is like doing paperwork; a fight in which I could see the outcome is so boring, that it’s not even entertaining as a game.”

Raine was extremely shocked. Yet the victor had already been decided. Around Raine were layers of magic circles formed by glowing mantras. They appeared out of thin air as Diablo snapped his fingers. Being caught in the magic circle, Raine didn’t dare to move a muscle. If she were to move, Diablo would trigger the magic.

And the spell was—

“T-this is multi-stage ‘Disintegration’…? B-but that spell is a hard counter to demons and is extremely dangerous. You could end up dying using it, why would you use that—?!”

Diablo glared coldly at Raine.

How can you not even know this—He thought to himself as he pitied her with a cold heart.

“How boring. If your faith in your master is strong enough, you can even control spiritrons. It’s common sense.”

“Are you out of your mind?! What kind of common sense is that—?!”

“Doesn’t matter. It’s time to send you on your way. I shall let you suffer the most painful death for foolishly daring to insult my beautiful master, Rimuru-sama. Reflect well on your crime now.”

Seven beams of light began to shoot out. While one beam of light contained forces of destruction that defied any attempts to counter it, all seven beams came from all directions and viciously made their way to Raine—

Luminas was genuinely irritated.

It just so happened that when she invited Demon Lord Rimuru to attend this musical exchange, the traitor Granbell decided to ravage the land. Such a miscalculation had been a first since the founding of Lubelius.

She wanted to head directly to the Grand Cathedral and decimate all those trouble-making enemies. But out of her instinct and reason, she did not. Seeing how much of a wreckage the enemies were making, it must have been a distraction.

Louis and Gunther stood by Luminas’s side. Neither of them dared to make a sound, fearing that it would further infuriate their master. Yet even when surrounded by serenity—just like Luminas, their hearts were anxious. However, they were not stupid enough to make the wrong judgement of what to prioritize.

If Granbell was handling the distraction, what would his goal be?

If it’s that man, he must know of my treasured Holy Ark. Then it’s not impossible that he’s thinking of liberating ‘Her’—

The Holy Ark was Luminas’s secret treasure. However, there was an even larger reason as to why she had to protect the Holy Ark at all costs. Granbell was among the people who knew the reason, so it was unlikely that he would target the Holy Ark. But even so, Luminas decided to trust her instinct.

And she guessed right.

In that deepest room, found within a tomb that nobody else should have known even existed, some unwanted guests showed up.

“Wha’ the hell, our infiltration has been compromised! Or maybe the security here is too tight?”

“Hehehe, how regretful, but looks like we have interesting prey here. Maybe we can make a bit of fuss?”

“Why not, but ya gotta be careful. That babe over there ain’t normal, I’m guessing yer probably Demon Lord Luminas-sama?”

Two intruders broke in and dropped some fighting words. They were Laplace and Footman.

Luminas was laying elegantly on a couch before the Holy Ark she was guarding with her life. Her guys were fixed on the two intruders.



These two men at first glance were no match for Luminas, but the aura they were giving off was something that she could not underestimate.

While hiding her strong emotions, Luminas solemnly spoke, “—I shall permit you to announce your names.”

While the clowns were surprised to find that their intrusion was expected, Granbell did mention the possibility. With that in mind, he had sent someone to tag along with them. That person had helped guide the clowns to make it through multiple layers of defense before reaching their destination safely.

“Nice to meet ya, I am ‘Wonder Pierrot’ 10 Laplace, Vice-Chairman of the jack-of-all-trades ‘Moderate Clown Troupe.’ This here is Footman,” he introduced himself in a teasing tone before signaling Footman with a gesture.

“Hehehe, I am ‘Angry Pierrot’ Footman. Even though I don’t know you too well, I’ll be in your care,” facing Luminas and her servants, Footman wasn’t shy in the slightest. His idea was pure and simple. Defeat his enemies—that was the only thing on his mind. He waited quietly for Laplace to give the green light.

“Oh yeah, there’s another one, com’ on in,” as Laplace called out, someone else appeared by the entrance. A blonde beauty showed up.

“……”

“She ain’t a big talker, but I think her name is—”

“I’ve met you in the past. Yes, you are the woman Granbell loved so deeply—Maria Rosso.”

“Right right right, that Maria! My my, so Luminas-sama knows her already?”

Hearing this, Luminas had a disgruntled expression.

“You there, quit acting all friendly. Self-introduction is over, so there won’t be any regrets now. The time to talk is over, we shall commune with our fists.”

Luminas’s tolerance was nearly depleted. She only held back knowing that someone was hiding, when the last person showed up, she couldn’t take it any longer.

“The hell, ya got a real short temper, no? We did finish our introduction; there’s one more thing though, Granbell wanted us to give ya a message.”

“Ho?”

“Then I’m gonna give ya the message: ‘I’ll be waiting for you on the ground, come and fight me. If you don’t come fast enough, the people you value are all gonna die.’ That’s basically what he said. He’s probably fighting that monster—Holy Knight Commander Hinata right now. I wonder who’s gonna win—”

Laplace went on and on before Louis shut him up with a sharp strike, one that Luminas had ordered with a wave of her hand, commencing the attack.

“Are you the one that killed my brother?” Louis demanded.

“Tsk, ya gotta hear other people out before doing this! Right, never mind. By the way, to answer yer question. Yep, that’s me, I was the one that killed that Roy guy that looked exactly like ya!”

“Umm, I have no interest in revenge; but this is a rare opportunity. I’m going to prove here that I’m stronger than my brother,” Louis fixed himself on Laplace as he finished.

“Then your opponent shall be me. Don’t bore me now, young man!”

“He-HEHEHE! That’s my line!”

Gunther and Footman exchanged looks before rushing out the tomb to duel. They were completely absorbed in their duel, disregarding the amount of damage done to their surroundings.

“Louis and Gunther sure give me a headache. They are usually so level-headed but get riled up in combat. But I’m the same way. Granbell, just you wait, even with your final trump card, you cannot stop me!”

Luminas was just like them; her sharp gaze fixed on the silent, frail-looking Maria.

“A dead person—perhaps not. Has Granbell still not given up? Maria has already passed on, it wouldn’t work even with my God’s Miracle ‘Resurrection.’ Lost souls cannot be saved, yet he…” Luminas muttered to herself calmly.

Indeed, the woman in front of her was not Maria. It was merely something that resembled her.

“Very well, I must perform the last rites over you.”

With burning youki surrounding her, Luminas stood up. She then began to fight against Maria at a speed no average man could see. Would the victor be Luminas, or the unknown entity that resembled Maria?

Only the Holy Ark remained in the tomb. Mindful of causing damage to their surroundings, everyone had moved outside. Predicting this, a young man emerged from the shadows.

“Ahaha, I never expected this plan to be so simple. But it’s true, just like Granbell said,” Yuuki sneered.

While not completely convinced by Granbell’s information, he hid his presence completely and followed. He was so well concealed that even Luminas was fooled.

Yuuki usually made sure to give off some of his aura so that he could completely conceal it during an emergency. Most people facing an opponent with a noticeable aura would get the impression that they were the stronger one, which made them more susceptible to getting careless. Knowing this, Yuuki had made sure to exploit it whenever possible. During important occasions that practice came in handy. This time was no exception. With little to no effort, Yuuki acquired his target item.

“So, this is the Holy Ark.”

He put his hand gently on the icy coffin to feel its surface.

“Ah…that’s what it’s made out of… An entity purely composed of holy particles. So things like this actually exist…”

It’s so fortunate that I tagged along—Yuuki thought to himself.

The others probably wouldn’t be able to even touch the exterior. It would likely burn up all their mana, yet with ‘Anti-Skill,’ it had no effect on Yuuki. He was the only one with the means to steal the strongest Hero.

And so, he broke the coffin without hesitation. The secret treasure Luminas had tried so hard to protect was destroyed so easily. A beautiful young girl was sleeping inside. She had to be the Hero Yuuki came to seek.

“Oh, this girl’s body is sealed too. Well, not that I can’t dispel it, but… Maybe I’ll just do it later.”

The security measure sure was tight. Yuuki gave off a wry smile internally. A ‘Barrier’ stronger than the Holy Ark covered every inch of the young girl’s skin.

I suppose I’ll take my time decrypting them at the base.

Coming to that conclusion, Yuuki’s eyes fell on the girl’s face.

“Who is this girl? I feel like I’ve seen her somewhere—uh, there’s no way.”

Her age was around sixteen. Her long, dark-silver hair covered up her private parts. She was like a newborn, naked with not a single piece of cloth.

“Uhh—I’ll probably be accused of sexual harassment for doing this, but there’s no time,” Yuuki muttered before picking up the beautiful teen.

“I got the Hero, now it’s time to bail.”

As he finished, Yuuki cracked an evil grin and left the scene.

—Why was the Hero sleeping in the Holy Ark in the first place? Is it really the weapon for the final battle as claimed by Granbell? Regardless of all that, what was Granbell’s true intention?

Yuuki was always skeptical, but perhaps because he had always found great success in what he did, he had grown pretentious, thinking that he could solve any problems that came up. This was probably why despite the doubts in his mind, he still cooperated with Granbell. Yuuki couldn’t begin to imagine the consequences of his action right now.

The otherworlders charged at me like zombies. I carefully paralyzed them one by one without killing anyone. Based on my current power level, even when faced against one hundred of such opponents, I wouldn’t have a hard time. At most the process of dispelling the curses would be troublesome.

Speaking of which…

These otherworlders were really something else. I focused and observed them carefully to discover that they all possessed a large quantity of magicules. Their constitution was strong as well, with some even showing strength that matched the level of rank A. However, for some reason, I didn’t feel that they lived up to the rank. At first, I thought that it was because of the difference in our strength, but it wasn’t the only reason: their free wills had been taken by Granbell. Moreover, there was also—

«Answer. During this battle, none of them used their Unique Skills.»

Ah, that’s it!

I get it now, so that’s how it is. None of the people I had been fighting launched any special attacks, that’s why the task of paralyzing them was so monotonous. In other words, even though there were so many otherworlders, none of them had a Unique Skill? Were they all holding back against me? No matter what the truth was, it felt strange. Anyhow, no matter what Granbell’s goal was, it’d all be resolved when I beat him.

After settling on the idea, I approached the last otherworlder. She looked rather young, around ten. She was probably old enough for magicule to settle properly inside her body. The child only wielded empty power, nothing challenging. I undid the curse skillfully. Everything proceeded smoothly. When she regained her consciousness, she seemed confused at the situation. I didn’t have the time to explain everything in detail to her, so I quickly knocked her out and let her lie down with the others.

There were several kids like her, so it was really difficult for me to handle them. Granbell didn’t seem to care about them at all, but I still managed to figure out a solution. His goal was probably to win some time. Had I been serious, it wouldn’t take much time to kill them all. It looked like Granbell achieved his goal in that regard.

But with this, all the otherworlders fighting me had been paralyzed. I didn’t know why he wanted to stall time, and truthfully, I didn’t really care at this point. I simply wanted to finish this battle as soon as possible.

Judging so, I turned to the battlefield to get hold of some information.

The children were all fine, so I could rest assured for now. Even under these circumstances, the band members were still practicing with utmost effort. Should I call them bold? Perhaps it was a good way to reduce stress by focusing all your attention on something.

Hinata and Granbell were both standing their ground in the duel; as expected from masters of combat. It wasn’t an exaggeration to say that the two were fighting at ultra-high speed. They were exchanging blows in a brilliant display of their masterful techniques, where a single mistake could not be tolerated. A misstep on my part might throw out the current balance and lead to either one’s swift defeat. I figured it would be best if I focused my attention on them later.

Shion and Ranga were being suppressed by Razul; however, his advantage wasn’t enough to guarantee victory. Shion allowed Razul to land his blows on her since all of her wounds could automatically be healed. ‘Ultra-Speed Regeneration’ was really a cheating Skill. No matter how vast the difference in strength, she could still rely on this Skill to get an edge.

Ranga, on the other hand, focused on landing attacks. He hid in Shion’s shadow and targeted Razul’s blind spots. He was also casting magic attacks such as ‘Death Heralding Wind’ and ‘Black Lightning.’

The clever method of combat was impressive. The problem was, however, that none of these attacks were working on Razul. In fact, he was very different. I recalled that Apito and Zegion were both insect type monsters like him. Their compound eyes could apparently watch their blind spots clearly, therefore he even evaded Ranga’s sneak attacks with ease. Basically, unless it was a powerful attack, it wouldn’t work on Razul.

The thing that looked like black armor on him was his exoskeleton. It was harder than steel. He could block Shion’s odachi with the shell of his left hand alone. It was ridiculously tough; therefore, nothing would work except an attack to the joints. It could also deflect Ranga’s magic, so the surface of his exoskeleton had an effect similar to ‘Magic Interference.’

If that was the case, no wonder Diablo had a tough time fighting. He excelled at using magic, so Razul would be his natural counter. With that being said, Diablo probably had other means to defeat him.

With advantages in both physical and magical defense, this Razul was something else. To think that such a formidable guy would have no ambition and serve Granbell… Never mind, even if Shion and Ranga were having a hard time fighting him, I would probably have been able to take him down.

On that note, I decided to take care of Razul—

I swung around to the entrance of the Grand Cathedral. I couldn’t help but immediately tense for a fight. Not only me, even Hinata, Shion, and the others were surprised. It was only natural.

After all, Demon Lord Leon, who wasn’t supposed to be here, was standing right there. Under his white robe was a high-quality knight uniform and golden armor. As always, he was a real handsome dude, though he seemed to be in a terribly foul mood. Leon was not alone; several knights were behind him. They all gave off a powerful aura. It looked like he only brought his lieutenants.

What is he doing here? Is he a friend or foe?

I figured that it was impossible for us to be on the same side, but I didn’t want to make Leon an enemy at this point.

“You have come, Demon Lord Leon-dono. Also, Hinata, since you are looking away while fighting against me, you must have plenty of strength to spare.”

Wouldn’t the one with strength to spare be Granbell?

He wasn’t fazed by what happened, yet he didn’t take the chance to attack Hinata either. He looked all calm and casual. That said, even if he had taken advantage of the situation, the opening shown by Hinata might have only been a trap. At the high level they were dueling at, only an honorable win would be recognized.

All in all, Granbell seemed to have known long ago that Leon would come. The suspicion was confirmed by the way he spoke. In other words, the two were on the same side.

“Don’t act all familiar now, who are you?”

“Oh yeah, this is our first time meeting. As a matter of fact, all the children you bought in the past were gathered by me. I must apologize to have troubled you to come here personally for the delivery this time.”

“……”

Maybe they weren’t together?

It looked like Leon and Granbell were just meeting for the first time. But it could’ve all been an act too… Now that they had mentioned it, most of the otherworlders beaten by me were not adults yet. They were mostly kids around the age of middle-schoolers. Could it be that Granbell was referring to—

“What are you talking about? I didn’t come to see you. The reason I am here is—”

“Ahh, I summoned children with the technique you taught me. Are you going to claim you knew nothing of it? Don’t you just want to fortify your forces with these unstable ‘Otherworld’ kids and make them into spirit-wielders? So you can build strengthened warriors like that Shizue Izawa.”

It almost felt like I’d been hit on the head with a stick.

Hinata wasn’t striking anymore either, but had her eyes glued on Granbell and Leon.

«Report. Danger detected. Suspicion that individual ‘Granbell Rosso’ is trying to use rhetoric to turn Master and Demon Lord Leon against each other.»

I got the feeling too.

No matter how you see it, it was a horrible move to antagonize Leon now. So I couldn’t trust Granbell’s words. With that being said—

“How many failures do you think I have sacrificed so you can summon who you want? The people here are the answer,” Granbell finished.

I could no longer ignore it now. Shizu-san was summoned by Leon and abandoned by him. Not only so, Leon seemed to have summoned other kids too. Such an evil deed could not go unpunished.

“Is all that true?”

“Of course it’s true, Demon Lord Rimuru. Where there is demand, there is supply. Us merchants were happy to provide.”

How infuriating. I wasn’t asking you, Granbell.

The supplier should have a moral code too. To push all the responsibilities to the consumer is against my philosophy. But compared to that, I wanted to confirm something else.

“You…it was not just Shizu-san, but other children as well?”

“Yes.”

“Even when you knew that unstable children wouldn’t survive for long?”

“That—”

As Leon was about to say something, a thunderous laugh rang out at the scene, interrupting him. It was Granbell.

“Kukuku, ku-HAHAHAHA! How funny, Leon. Wasn’t your request for us to provide ‘Otherworld children under the age of ten’! As opposed to performing stable summonings of otherworlders and commanding that, why not ‘rescue’ unstable children and do them a favor? And then manipulate them to make them your weapons, didn’t you?!”

These were incendiary words; Granbell’s goal was obvious. He knew that I was soft-hearted and wanted to exploit that trait. In other words, he wanted to provoke my sense of justice and turn me against Leon.

However—Granbell’s words actually had very high credibility. For the spirits to possess the children, the summoned ones needed to be in the so-called ‘unstable state’ Granbell mentioned.

Is it really the reason? Is this why all Leon’s subordinates are shrouded in the auras of spirits?

“…Is this true?”

“Yes. But I have my reason—”

“Shut up! So this really was your doing!” I shouted and went straight for Leon.

I couldn’t relinquish my anger without punching the guy in the face. Even knowing that it was Granbell’s scheme, I couldn’t dismiss my anger towards Leon. We’d talk about reasons later, I had to relieve some of my hatred first.

And so, I used all my force to punch Leon. He didn’t move. He stopped all his subordinates trying to protect him and looked straight into my eyes.

Did that mean it’d be simple for him to take care of me? Or was it—

My fist was rapidly closing in on Leon’s face, faster than my accelerated thoughts could follow.

Leon didn’t even flinch.

«—Subject displays no signs of evasion, brace for impact.»

There was no trap. The next second, my fist connected with Leon’s right cheek.

“—You got it out of your system now?”

I struck with my full force, yet it didn’t cause a lot of damage to Leon. His lip seemed to be split as he wiped the blood from it with a handkerchief, yet he didn’t move an inch.

Tsk, even though I hadn’t applied any Skill with the strike, clearly, I underestimated Leon a bit. It was with that punch that I realized something. I felt that this guy—Demon Lord Leon—was a lot kinder than I expected. The proof was that he took the hit when he was completely unguarded, even though, by any reason, he didn’t have to let me do it at all. While his demeanor always gave an impression of cruelty, he wasn’t that bad a person at heart.

Shizu-san didn’t hate Leon. She wanted to hate him but could not do it no matter how. She wanted to check Leon’s genuine thoughts—that was Shizu-san’s dying wish.

There was no need for Raphael-san to give me any advice. I was calm from the start. I had made a promise with Shizu-san. As she had regrets before passing, I would find her justice with Demon Lord Leon. To fulfill that promise, I made use of this situation.

There must have been reasons behind Leon’s action. I’d decide whether I should forgive him later. During such chaotic circumstances, antagonizing Leon would undoubtedly be suicidal. This was no time to judge based on emotion.

Leon wasn’t on my side, nor was he the enemy—knowing this, I gave my answer.

“Not enough. Even though I’ve conveyed Shizu-san’s feelings, my feud with you hasn’t been resolved yet. About that, we are gonna have a nice chat about it now?”

Now, did he get what I meant?

Leon’s eyebrow twitched slightly. By the looks of it, Leon was no fool either; now I was reassured. Then let’s have a nice chat—about how to handle Granbell.

On that thought, I raised my sword and pointed it at Leon.

He looked just like a young Shizu. No pigmentation of any kind, his skin was tender and meticulous. His hair was smooth, every strand was glowing. It was no longer the appearance of an asian person. While he kept Shizu’s form, his beauty was on a different level.

As his golden eyes gazed at Leon deeply, he opened his pink lips and said, “Not enough. Even though I’ve conveyed Shizu-san’s feelings, my feud with you hasn’t been resolved yet. About that, we are gonna have a nice chat about it now?”

While Rimuru said this, Leon immediately caught on to the meaning behind his words.

I see, so he wants to utilize this situation? In other words, even though he doesn’t know me too well, he decided to trust me, nonetheless? This guy is surprisingly bold.

Leon didn’t dislike it.

Rimuru appeared to be doing things based on emotion, but in hindsight, all of those things must have been calculated. It was to differentiate who was friend and foe under these chaotic circumstances.

I thought that I shouldn’t lower my guard against this guy, but with everything that’s going on, he turned out to be quite reliable.

While thinking so, Leon drew the sword by his waist and assumed a combat stance.

Earlier, aboard the dragon ship on his way to Lubelius, Leon received an emergency message via ‘Magic Communication’ from the secret organization ‘Cerberus.’

The message stated that one of their intelligence personnel lost contact, likely due to his real identity being discovered by someone. This someone could be Demon Lord Rimuru or the Five Great Elders. There was also the possibility of it being the Holy Knight Order. Since the person in question had lost contact after being captured, it was only natural to be suspicious of anyone.

However, Leon was not dumb enough to trust the words of Cerberus. This could be a well-drafted plot aimed at deceiving Leon. There was only one thing he was sure of—heading to the holy land now would mean entering a trap voluntarily. But even so, it wasn’t enough to shake Leon’s resolve.

It doesn’t matter if it’s a trap, as long as Chloe is there—no matter what danger lay ahead, Leon didn’t care.

Fast forwarding to the present, Leon had finally calmed down as he drew his sword against Rimuru. He began to observe the surroundings and tried to get hold of the situation. The battlefield was in a shocking state of chaos. It was difficult to even tell friend from foe.

The Magic Knight Order elites who were protecting Leon somehow got mixed in the fight as well. They were cleverly lured into battle by someone and started fighting with the local forces at the holy land.

‹Continue to defend, you must not kill your opponent.›

‹Understood!›

Leon gave his order to Silver Knight Alrose. Even though he used an encrypted channel, the presence of eavesdroppers was to be expected. He had already prepared himself for that and only gave orders that were intended to avoid future problems.

Since no matter how you saw it, Leon’s presence here made him seem like a troublemaker. To Demon Lord Luminas, Leon was definitely an unwanted guest. It wouldn’t be strange if she retaliated against him. Under these circumstances, in order to ensure the situation favored his side, Leon wanted to lower the human casualties to the minimum.

Speaking of which, where did that Luminas go?

Near the entrance to the Grand Cathedral, Leon and Rimuru fought. Holy Knight Commander Hinata was dueling against Granbell not far from there. Behind them, Shion and Ranga, who both participated in the Walpurgis Banquet, fought the insect type monster, Razul.

There was no way that Demon Lord Luminas, the ruler of this land, would allow such a thing to happen, yet there was not a trace of her to be found. If someone as strong as Luminas was getting stalled—no matter how you saw it, the situation was extremely abnormal.

To Leon, the situation was all too strange, though based on his previous assessment, the goal of this trap was rather obvious. While he did not know the perpetrator, the goal was to have Demon Lord Rimuru fight against Leon. However, while it was a miscalculation to this unknown perpetrator, it was good luck to Leon—that being Rimuru easily seeing through the trap.

And Rimuru was trying to make use of that to control the situation. Right in front of Leon, Rimuru signaled his eyes to Granbell.

I see, so that’s the guy behind all this? Very well, I shall put my faith in you for once.

It was truly rare for the usually cautious Leon, as he decided to open his heart and trust Rimuru.

Leon was not the only one stuck in a state of confusion. Hinata was baffled by the continuously shifting circumstances as well. More importantly, Granbell, whom she was dueling, gave off an ominous aura, it was very eerie.

“Are you wondering why you can’t rob any techniques from me?”

“—?!”

Being exposed so promptly, Hinata couldn’t help but express her shock visibly.

“Hmph, don’t be so surprised now. Do you really think I wouldn’t discover your secret? I merely had to observe it to guess. That’s why I had the other six fight you first.”

“So that’s why…”

Hinata’s Unique Skill ‘Usurper’ had an absolute advantage against people stronger than her. Yet the analysis result of Granbell in the past was ‘not applicable.’ By any logic, Granbell should’ve been stronger than her. That’s why Hinata tried using ‘Usurper’ on him during their training sessions until it returned ‘successful’ in robbing Skills from Granbell. She could not rob them completely, at most copying them…

“You can rob Skills and Arts from your opponent through some means, can’t you? But You can only use that little trick on the same person once, and haven’t you already tried robbing my Skill before? That’s why you won’t be able to do it again.”

“How can that be…”

Granbell’s words were met with an involuntary response from Hinata. She quickly realized she had thought out loud.

“Kukuku, so that is the case. Hinata, you are the most talented disciple I’ve taught. You were good at scheming, cautious yet cunning. In the history of the order, there were very few who have reached your level. You should be proud of that. Yet you are still too young, too amateur fighting against someone on your level.”

“Don’t you ever shut up?!” Hinata, seemingly impatient, shouted back at Granbell.

However, Hinata knew that she was getting baited by Granbell. Because of her accidental reaction, she admitted to the fact that she could rob other people’s abilities. Granbell had his suspicion in the past but was probably not one hundred percent sure. He managed to get it out of Hinata by her own mouth.

Just who is more cunning!

Even while he was going all out against Hinata, Granbell kept on talking.

That composure—that was what Hinata could not tolerate.

“Even if I’ve robbed your Skill in the past, I still have other ways to do this. Don’t you look down on me now.”

Hinata’s hostility towards Granbell was on full display. Indeed, Hinata still had her trump card ‘Forced Usurpation.’ It wouldn’t be copying this time, but completely robbing his Skill. By doing this, Granbell would run out of tricks to use and Hinata would achieve victory.

Observation ends here—seemingly implying this, Hinata proceeded with a flurry of attacks. Each of her swings held deadly power. At the same time, she consecutively activated ‘Usurper’ to weaken Granbell’s strength.

However—

How is this possible, my Skill should be taking effect—?!

Yet the analysis result was still ‘not applicable.’ It meant that Granbell’s strength was indeed weaker than Hinata’s. Indeed, she was much more powerful than before and it wouldn’t be strange if she had surpassed Granbell, therefore this result would be sensible.

The problem was however—

Even when she was using her most reliable ‘Forced Usurpation’ to rob Granbell’s Skills, Granbell was still using the same Skill the next second, the result was the same no matter how many times she had repeated. Hinata’s anxiousness was written on her face. She did in fact rob Granbell of his Skills and Arts, but they were useless to Hinata. You couldn’t rob an already robbed Skill, there was no use in piling up more.

However, it could prove to be useful if she managed to rob Granbell’s ace in the hole…

Why is this happening? Perhaps Granbell knew someone may try to rob his Skills and had made copies beforehand?

It was a possibility.

While the average man wouldn’t be able to handle it, Granbell was an ex-Hero. A trick such as this wouldn’t be a problem for him.

“What is it, Hinata? You don’t look so good.”

Granbell gave off a mocking smile. It looked like he’d seen through Hinata’s mind—that was the source of Hinata’s irritation.

“Huh, based on your looks, you don’t know what I’ve done. There’s nothing more important in combat than to observe your enemy carefully. Could it be that you thought I wouldn’t prepare any countermeasures? If I am right, then your thoughts were honestly too naive, Hinata.”

“Tsk, you sure talk a lot of nonsense.”

“I can tell from the way you fight. You are good at fighting against opponents stronger than you. In contrast, you seemed to rarely rob Skills from opponents weaker than you. But to have done that in the past, nonetheless, must imply you have some special means. However, doesn’t it exhaust you quickly as well?”

“……”

“You don’t have to answer. Based on your current state, I can confirm my speculation.”

Hinata was shocked that she had been completely seen through. She always thought that Granbell was an old-timer and held a sense of disdain against him. Right now, she really wanted to punch her old self.

“Uh…indeed. Looks like it’s meaningless to continue like this.”

Activating her ‘Forced Usurpation’ from here on would be pointless, she concluded, as she distanced herself from Granbell for a moment. She adjusted her breathing and took note of the beating in her chest. Her heart rate had reached record-breaking pace. Sweat was pouring down her forehead at an increasing rate.

Thump—Deep inside Hinata’s chest, she felt a light sense of pain.

—What was that? No, it’s probably because I burnt more stamina than I expected to. But maybe it’s not a calculation error, maybe it’s the effect of some sort of attack…

Looking at it objectively, she found that she was getting tired a lot faster than usual. Even with her consecutive use of ‘Forced Usurpation,’ Hinata shouldn’t have consumed as much stamina as she did now. Just as Granbell had pointed out, Hinata had exhausted herself to the point that she could no longer ignore it either.

“You look rather confused, Hinata. You are indeed strong. But against my more dishonorable way of fighting, you don’t really have enough experience.”

“What are you talking about?”

“It’s very simple. All of my moves were calculated so that it would waste as much of your stamina as possible. Little by little, you tired yourself out every time you thought your attack would pull through if only you could muster that tiny bit of extra strength. Heed me now, if you are fighting against someone on your own level, you’d snatch a ticket to victory by tiring out your opponent. Once their judgement becomes dull, they will show bigger openings, just like what you are experiencing right now.”

“—!”

Hinata could not deny Granbell’s words even if she wanted to. She had analyzed her battle calmly with her Unique Skill ‘Mathematician’—or so she thought. Yet Granbell was clearly ten steps ahead of her. She had thought she was cautious enough against Granbell. While she had looked down on him in the past, she had never dropped her guard.

By the looks of it, this man is stronger than me, is that it? Yes, that’s it. I guess this is the resulting difference between technique and experience.

That was the honest, logical explanation Hinata deduced, she couldn’t help but admit. Her ‘Usurper’ was unable to rob combat experience.

“I understand the situation. I must really go all out in order to beat you then.”

“Correct. Now show me what you’re really capable of, or else you can keep dreaming about surpassing me.”

Shutting out all unnecessary noise, Hinata focused herself entirely on Granbell. In a world of silence, the two of them were isolated.

“Here I come, Elder Granbell!”

“I shall dance with you then, Hinata!”

As it stood, the battle between Hinata and Granbell raged on, fiercer than ever before.

Diablo’s multi-stage ‘Disintegration’ gradually broke through every defensive barrier of Raine’s. The last beam pierced cleanly through her chest.

Everything had gone according to Diablo’s plan. Raine was still breathing, which Diablo had also accounted for.

“Kufufufufufu, how weak. Fighting you felt more boring than fighting Testarossa before she evolved.”

“Te-Testarossa?”

“That’s none of your business. Compared to that, why have you come here? Tell me the reason.”

“Do you honestly think I’d—!”

While Diablo asked arrogantly, Raine didn’t feel the need to obey. She refused without hesitation, much to Diablo’s displeasure.

Despite having just defeated her, he was not relaxed. The fully evolved insect type monster was left for Shion and Ranga to deal with, that thing was no joke—the natural enemy to the demon race.

It was a life-form from a different dimension, living inside the crevices of the physical and spiritual world. They were semi-spiritual life-forms and upon entering the physical world, they would naturally gain a body and become a challenging invader. If there were a large group of them, they would be extremely dangerous. Such dangerous species must be discovered early on and eliminated as soon as possible.

Essentially, it was extremely rare for these monsters to evolve into humanoid forms. They usually couldn’t adapt to the physical world and would be stuck at a certain level of evolution. Yet that insect type monster called Razul somehow evolved into its final form. Diablo thought that even Shion and Ranga combined would have trouble dealing with it.

To be fair, Shion-dono is Rimuru-sama’s subordinate, after all. She is capable of committing horrors that may potentially turn the table entirely, despite the difference in strength. With Ranga-dono at her side, they probably won’t lose. But even if that’s the case—

Diablo could win against Razul. He thought that eliminating uncertain factors like that from the battlefield would serve Rimuru-sama’s interests. That’s why he wanted to head back quickly to finish off Razul…

And yet, another thought crossed his mind.

Diablo suspected that Rimuru was being intentional when he assigned Shion and Ranga to the task. It was true that Diablo was shaken. He felt the presence of Raine closing in and didn’t want them to disrupt the battlefield. That was why Diablo couldn’t focus on his fight.

And I was so pretentious to think I should have taken out Razul fast…

But was this really better?

Perhaps Rimuru-sama wanted Shion-dono and Ranga-dono to fight against a powerful foe in order to gain experience. Then I would only get in the way by defeating him… Diablo thought.

This was the train of thought one would expect from a battle maniac. Normal people wouldn’t come to a bizarre conclusion like this. Diablo was an absolute believer of Rimuruism, which meant that any action taken that was not according to Rimuru’s will would run afoul with him.

Just win against your enemy—Things were not that simple.

As Diablo passed the opportunity to fight against a rare powerhouse to them, he had also genuinely hoped they would win against this opponent and turn them into their useful experience.

I really have to take it slow and be careful with my judgement in this kind of situation.

And so, Diablo’s thoughts derailed far into the land of misunderstandings. While someone as masterful in combat as Raine was right in front of him, Diablo’s mind was in turmoil.

Of course, Rimuru never considered any of this. He merely wanted the whole thing to end smoothly and ensure the safety of the children and the band members. Having Shion and Ranga gain combat experience was something that didn’t even cross his mind under these circumstances.

Diablo’s mind had sailed in a completely wrong direction. And based on this absolutely wrong judgment, Diablo’s plan took a huge turn.

“I was planning to kill you, but I guess not.”

“What are you saying…? Was that a threat—”

“No, it’s enough. You don’t have to act anymore, just come out already,” Diablo said in the face of Raine, who had a huge hole in her chest.

She didn’t seem to understand what he was saying, but her expression gradually turned to one of agitation. Unlike the pale face from before learning she was defeated, her expression now looked quite complicated, a mixture of chagrin and hatred.

“Noir…you, you only managed to evolve to demon peer recently—”

“You are as much of a blockhead as always. Strength is not a matter of magicule content alone, it’s about your techniques. Just as my senpai once said, ‘A difference in magicule content does not equate to a difference in strength.’”

“How dare you say something so arrogant…”

Raine’s voice slowly dissipated as her body disappeared. She turned into ashes and vanished. In that moment, a beam of light pierced the sky, and as the light faded, two figures emerged.

They were Bleu and Rouge. The one who was kneeling was Bleu—Raine. The one standing majestically was Rouge—the strongest, Demon Lord Guy Crimson.

“Hey, long time no see, Noir.”

“Hmm, Rouge—no, you are now Guy Crimson. So you were here.”

Diablo had been keeping his guard up for Guy from the start.

To Diablo, Guy began to talk in a reminiscing tone.

“You’ve realized from the start that it was just Raine’s ‘Mist,’ haven’t you? If that was the case, why did you still make use of such a powerful spell?”

Diablo frowned in disgust at the question.

Basically, he had pretended to not realize Raine’s ‘Mist’ from the start. According to Diablo’s original plan, he was going to mislead Raine’s actual self and Guy, who were watching over him to get the impression that “This guy’s not that strong after all.” Had they seen Diablo act all pretentiously and left after beating Raine’s ‘Mist,’ Guy would’ve probably been disappointed in Diablo. He would lose interest and leave right away.

This way, Diablo would have been able to hide his ability from Guy and win some time to help Shion and the others. Yet this plan was forced to be terminated. This was out of Diablo’s own pursuit.

You don’t have to act anymore—This line was meant for Diablo himself too.

“Wouldn’t it be impossible to beat us primordial demons with just ‘Disintegration’? A trick like that couldn’t even be called a trump card.”

“Ho, you sure talk big. Even I wouldn’t be able to stand unfazed if shot directly.”

“If I took a direct hit, I would disappear too; that said, I’d first need to be hit directly.”

“Kuku, AHAHAHA!”

“Kufufufufu.”

Guy laughed with satisfaction hearing Diablo’s response. Diablo continued with this calm attitude as he stood his ground against Guy. During this, Raine was treated like air.

“Oh by the way, why did you wait until now to evolve? Aren’t you different from those three and didn’t want to draw anyone back?”

“Umm, while those three might seem to be dragging each other back, the truth is that it was their way of entertaining themselves. But it is true I had nothing to do with them. Guy, I wanted to ask you something too. Do you think that there could be people stronger than us in this world?”

Diablo responded to Guy’s doubts with a question, similar to the one he had asked Testarossa. Such a statement was common sense among the primordial demons, Guy being no exception, so it was easier to get a response.

“Probably no—if I had to give an answer, probably ‘True Dragons,’ but they are more like natural phenomena.”

Even ‘True Dragons’ would not be a threat to Guy. It may be different had ‘Star King Dragon’ Veldanava been resurrected. Considering the current state of things, Guy wasn’t wrong.

“Indeed,” Diablo nodded, “we are the strongest. However, evolving even knowing this, wouldn’t it make fighting others boring since it’s a one-sided slaughter?” he claimed with a smile on his face.

This was another mindset one could expect from a battle maniac.

“So that’s how you see it.”

Guy understood it now too. Even though they wouldn’t admit it out loud, the two had very similar personalities, and they were surprisingly tacit in times like these.

“Did your view change because of that slime?”

“He is called Rimuru-sama, please don’t call him a slime.”

“…Got it. So the reason why you evolved was because of this Rimuru, right?”

Diablo had always lived life on his own terms, at his own pace, which pissed Guy off a bit. But complaining now won’t help things progress. While playing along would still piss Guy off, he cooperated with Diablo and rephrased his question.

Right—Diablo continued: “Rimuru-sama’s growth so far has been most astonishing. What he has achieved was truly worthy of the name evolution. He’s also incredibly adorable in appearance, his soul is filled with noble spirit, moreover—”

“Are you gonna go on with this for a while?”

“…?”

That goes without saying—Almost as if saying this, Diablo returned a sharp look at Guy.

“Let’s stop with Rimuru for a while and talk about you?”

Diablo was a little displeased, but he suspected the situation was rather dire and decided to follow Guy’s suggestion.

“Tsk, can’t be helped then. Let me cut to the chase, the companions of Rimuru-sama have also been progressing at an extraordinary pace every day, and I, too, was inspired by such an atmosphere.”

“…Oh, how surprising.” Guy looked a bit exhausted, but he still tried his best digesting Diablo’s words.

“Yes, if I live too casually, I may eventually get left behind. There is no reason for me to limit my growth living in that kind of environment.”

So that was the reason. Now Guy understood.

Guy finally picked up his pace.

“Rimuru seemed to have dominated the Western Nations,” Guy told Diablo, then cracking an evil grin, “but unfortunately, my subordinates should be wreaking havoc over there.”

In Guy’s view, it was simply a prank he pulled on the humans. For Rimuru, on the other hand, who wanted to have a friendly relationship with the humans, the situation was a lot more severe.

That was the reason why Guy said this. Trying to create trouble for Diablo was a fool’s errand, so instead he targeted Rimuru, catching Diablo in the fallout. That was when he recalled that his subordinates were starting a rampage in the Western Nations, so he decided to exploit the situation a bit.

Diablo, who used to be able to rival Guy, suddenly acknowledged someone as his master, and Guy was not amused by it. That’s why he decided to provoke Diablo and try to start trouble.

Without Razul guarding the northern realm, the Western Nations were lacking in reserve. Just as Guy said, the place was probably a living hell now. Considering the current circumstances, Diablo would not be able to do anything about it. Even Rimuru would not be able to react. Or so Guy thought.

Upon hearing that, Diablo continued to laugh in his usual kufufu manner.

“You think Rimuru-sama has not expected that? He has already made arrangements. Rimuru-sama’s magnificent mind could perceive and foresee all things in life—”

And Guy thought Diablo would be shaken a bit, yet he was completely unfazed. Worse than that, even under these circumstances he was still singing Rimuru’s praises.

What a nutjob—Guy couldn’t help but realize.

“…Oh, he does seem very interesting. I suppose that guy has exceeded my expectations?”

“Yes, that is only natural. It is only natural to Rimuru-sama.”

Diablo would continue to provoke Guy, big time, during the absence of Rimuru. Had Rimuru known this, he would have shouted “What the hell are you doing!”

Raine bit her lips regretfully hearing their conversation. Yet Guy and Diablo continued completely ignoring her.

………

……

…

It was during which—

The Western Nations were experiencing an unprecedented crisis. The main defense force of the Cidre Border region, who were in charge of fending off demons, had disappeared for reasons unknown. Due to their inability to defeat the regularly invading demon armies, they requested emergency support.

“How can this be! You said that the demon army is coming down south?!”

“What the hell is the Count of Cidre Border doing!”

“There’s no time for pointless squabbling. All nations should be assembling their armies and setting up defensive positions at important junctions! Or else the Capital of Ingracia will also fall prey to the invasion of the demon army!”

The delegates of every nation had gathered for an emergency council meeting and were quarreling endlessly without a solution in sight.

The Western States Council was an organization formed by delegates of its member states. Even though the council’s decisions held great weight, it would also waste a lot of time in following procedure during emergency situations. This was the biggest weakness of a democratic majority vote system.

The defense of the northern realm was handled alone by the Count of the Cidre Border in the kingdom of Ingracia. Around half of the total military strength of Ingracia was deployed in the north against Guy Crimson. Moreover, several Holy Knights were dispatched there as well, alongside several rank A adventurers from its subsidiary organization, the Freedom Association.

That was how important the land was as a strategic location. If it were to fall, it would be a matter of life or death for humanity. No wonder why the councilors that had gathered were in such a panicked state.

Right now, the final line of defense was barely holding on as the Holy Knights and adventurers stationed there were taking the brunt of things. Based on the dire situation that was unfolding, they needed to send reinforcements immediately.

However, there wasn’t enough time.

While this might have already been accomplished with authoritarian states, since the decision was made by a league consisting of independent entities, they needed to request approval from their respective home nations first. The quickest solution right now was to issue an emergency request to the Freedom Association.

A solution for the Kingdom of Ingracia, the host nation of the council, was to mobilize their military reserve. On the other hand, since it would likely weaken the defense of Ingracia’s capital, they definitely would not approve of this decision.

Speaking of which, the responsibility of defending the northern realm had always been managed by Ingracia, so it wouldn’t be unreasonable if they were to request additional troops from other nations. Just like what one of the unnamed councilors had already shouted, it was more viable to form a coalition army.

Even so, there was a catch: the soldiers dispatched by various nations would be led by the newcomer—the Jura-Tempest Federation.

The motion had passed with unanimous support, so one would expect zero complaints. Yet, to the councilors, willfully handing over their nation’s precious military to monsters was a hard pill to swallow.

“Please remain silent!” the Speaker of the Western States Council shouted, trying to restore order in the hall.

The eyes of the other councilors fell on the Speaker as he addressed his audience. “Right now, we are faced with an unprecedented crisis. Rather than arguing, you should try to establish contact with your home nations as soon as possible and order their troops here. We have the delegate from the Tempest Federation, appointed by Demon Lord Rimuru-sama, present. She—Testarossa-dono—knows her way around military strategies. Since Rimuru-sama has entrusted her as his proxy, she should be worthy to lead the coalition army.”

While some were against the Speaker’s view, they weren’t bold enough to voice their protests. And because there weren’t any alternative solutions, complaining here would only worsen the situation.

At this point, every councilor’s eyes were fixed on Testarossa. As the council summoned their army, executive military control would ultimately fall to Testarossa. It was, to some extent, normal that everyone would simultaneously begin to assess her.

Among the councilors, Testarossa was an unusual sight—being a young woman, not to mention gorgeous looks on top of that as well.

There are so many beauties from Tempest—many councilors couldn’t help but think. But no one was stupid enough to say it out loud. Everyone was wondering why this woman, this “Testarossa,” had so much power.

While it might sound like an exaggeration, the success of this whole affair was not only tied to the councilors’ fates, but also the fate of humanity.

One of the councilors braced himself and asked Testarossa a question. “T-Testarossa-dono, uhh—I understand it is rude of me to ask this, but do you really know how to command the army?”

With a bewitching smile, Testarossa replied: “Please rest assured, everyone. My master Rimuru-sama has given the order to protect every nation that is a member of the Western States Council. My subordinates have already departed to each nation. Also—Moss.”

“Yes ma’am. According to the information I just received, reliable reinforcements have reached the northern defense.”

This young boy, Moss, must be Testarossa’s servant—while the councilors quietly had the thought, Moss’s report sent a wave of shock across the hall.

“W-what!”

“I-is this true?”

“T-then, Testarossa-dono, what are these ‘reinforcements’ referring to?”

“Moss.”

“Yes ma’am. Dragon ships from the Sorcerer’s Dynasty Sarion are heading to the scene. There are some lesser demons scuffling there; however, with that elf’s subordinates, they will be easily taken out.”

“Everything you heard, Speaker-dono, is true. By the way, Moss, it’s very rude to call His Majesty Rimuru’s ally an elf.”

“Ah! M-my utmost apolog—”

“Don’t ever do it again, understand? Make sure to address her as Her Majesty Elmesia.”

“U-understood.”

Under the intense glare of Testarossa’s crimson eyes, Moss shrank back in fear. His face paled with the realization that he still hadn’t outgrown the prejudices he held from his time as an archduke in the demon realm. If he were to anger Testarossa, then he’d be signing his own death warrant. Moreover, to have belittled Rimuru’s friends, Moss himself could not allow such a mistake.

Perhaps it was because Testarossa knew what Moss was thinking that she did not pursue the subject any further and only gave him a warning. If Moss hadn’t changed his arrogant attitude, he likely would have been executed by Testarossa the very next second. Despite Moss being a demon of great standing, he still pledged his eternal loyalty to Testarossa. That would never change.

Testarossa was truly a gentle yet cruel person.

The next moment, the atmosphere within the hall became unbelievably chaotic. After listening to the conversation between Testarossa and Moss, the councilors had gotten a rough idea of the situation. On the other hand, there was no evidence to back up her claim, so they couldn’t just blindly trust them either.

“Our nation believes in Testarossa-dono.”

“Umm, our nation agrees. We shall entrust the handling of all military affairs to Testarossa-dono.”

Some of them declared their support outright.

“How can you say that, isn’t that being too irresponsible?! If anything were to happen, it’d be too late!”

“Hear, hear! If the talk of reinforcements were all a lie, human society would be crushed by demons!”

Some of them rejected the idea…

They continued to argue as the council was split into two sides.

Testarossa observed this pandemonium rather casually. She did not give her opinion and merely watched.

Not long after, Testarossa suddenly stood up.

“I get it now, it was you. You’ve hidden yourself quite well.”

This happened so abruptly, the councilors were all confused about what Testarossa was saying.

Although, there was one person’s face that turned pale, with sweat dripping down his cheeks, when Testarossa gazed at him.

He was one of the Five Great Elders. The Duke of the Kingdom of Rostia, Johann Rostia.

“W-what did I do?” Trying his hardest to hide his inner panic, Johann questioned Testarossa in return. Yet Testarossa simply cracked an amused smile.

Johann lost his composure and reacted first.

“A-as expected, monsters are indeed untrustworthy! We have to use our own strength to protect humanity. Guards, guards, get over here!” he shouted, acting all serious. His face was covered with a thin sheen of perspiration, desperately trying to fight the fear he felt. In contrast, Testarossa’s smile deepened.

Noticing Johann’s order, soldiers quickly charged into the meeting hall, his personal guards among them too. He quickly regained his composure.

Testarossa began playing with her hair, looking elegant as she did so, while the other councilors fell into disorder again.

What Johann had done was completely out of line. Even if Testarossa was bearing malicious intent, an unlawful act that purposefully ignored the rules of the council would not be tolerated. Regardless of how important Johann’s position was, such reckless behavior was unsanctioned.

“You there, your name is Johann Rostia, correct? The Duke of Rostia, a rather prestigious position.”

“S-so what? It’s no use flattering me now—”

“Johann-dono, who were you communicating with via ‘Magic Communication’ just now?”

“What—!”

“Why did you give the order to disrupt this nation’s ‘Defensive Barrier’?”

“H-how did you…”

“Could you please tell me why?” Testarossa pressured Johann to answer with the demeanor of someone casually chatting in a tea party.

The other councilors were all flabbergasted. There was no time to panic anymore. They immediately ordered their subordinates to confirm the ‘Defensive Barrier’ of Ingracia’s capital.

Before they could get an answer—

Everyone felt the rumbling that slowly started occurring in every direction, like an earthquake.

“Could this be true—!”

“How could you destroy the barrier?! This means it can’t prevent monsters from invading anymore! This will bring catastrophe upon the civilians!”

“Seriously, what in the world is going on! Johann-dono, please give us an explanation!”

Seeing someone more panicked than themselves, people would naturally be influenced by that as well, causing a positive feedback loop and eventually falling into a state of fear. Yet, if you were to take a step back in these circumstances, you would naturally regain composure.

Johann belonged to the latter category.

Knowing his plan had come to fruition, a serene smile emerged on his face.

“Girard-dono, the barrier has disappeared, and thus the time has come. Please summon that lord.”

Urged on by Johann, someone began to move. The councilors’ faces turned pale as they laid eyes on the man.

“T-that man, he’s the leader of the mercenary band ‘Apostles of Verte’—”

“Commander Girard!”

“Are the ‘Apostles of Verte’ linked not only to Gavan, but Johann as well?!”

“If that’s the case, what is Johann-dono planning?”

Ignoring the councilors’ comments, Girard stood by Johann’s side.

“Our contract is effectively complete as of this moment. Thank you for the assistance.”

“It’s nothing, but you’re welcome. This is the final wish of our leader, the Great Elder Granbell. It just so happens to align with your goal. Come on then, no need to hold back. If you are going to do it, make it thorough, and turn this place into a living hell!” Johann declared, laughing maniacally.

The light of reason gradually dissipated from his eyes, and instead was replaced by his true vicious nature.

It was not until this moment that the councilors finally realized Johann was the traitor. Even so, the ‘Defensive Barrier’ of the capital had already been breached.

Seemingly grasping their situation, the councilors all looked desperate.

“Ayn, it’s time.”

“Umm, understood!”

Following Girard’s encouragement, the woman named Ayn commenced with her chanting. It was summoning magic.

Ayn was the leader of the labyrinth team ‘Green Rebellion’ and a spirit wielder. However, what she was summoning this time was not a spirit, but the god worshipped by the ‘Apostles of Verte.’

A dark oval-shaped portal appeared. A powerful being of undiluted strength crossed the gate and stepped in front of everyone. It was a green-haired beauty in a dark red maid outfit. Yet everyone could tell that this beauty was dangerous. Contrasting with her attractive appearance was the youki, reeking of desolate despair, that emanated from her entire body.

Even the magical inquisitors that arrived after sensing the disturbance were petrified by this youki. Their instincts told them—moving even a hair now would get them killed.

The one that emerged from the darkness—her name was Mizeri, a demon peer.

Amidst the sudden desperation, Johann sneered with satisfaction. He recalled the day that he was summoned by Granbell for the last time. With the demise of Gavan, there were only four people left among the Five Great Elders:

The head of the Rosso Family—Granbell Rosso.

The Count of the Cidre Border of the Kingdom of Ingracia.

King Dolan of the Dolan Kingdom.

And then there was Johann.

Granbell summoned all three and gave them the terrifying final order. “Mariabell is dead. At this point, us Rossos have exhausted our strength. Perhaps it is possible to achieve our goal from a different perspective and coexist with monsters. If it were like Luminas-sama’s method and that they had no interest in the human domain, we could perhaps successfully coexist with one another. On the other hand, if we were to walk the path that Demon Lord Rimuru promotes, humanity would fall prey to his control. We must stop him at all costs.”

“But Great Elder Granbell, if there is no viable way to fight back, regardless of what plan we create, it would have flaws.”

“I am well aware of what Mariabell was afraid of, but now that even our Chaos Dragon trump card is lost, we have no more options left. Razul should not be moved out so easily either…”

Dolan’s words were a reality check. Cidre nodded while Johann agreed.

Johann had directly interacted with the dangerous individual named Mariabell before. To have won against that menacing young girl, Demon Lord Rimuru sure was terrifying.

Right now, it’s probably smarter to pretend to play along with Rimuru’s will as we accumulate our strength again—that was Johann’s belief.

With that being said, likely sensing that the others were hesitant, Granbell expressed his view vociferously. “Fools, did you lose your nerve? No matter how chaotic the world is, no matter what sacrifice we have to make, the human world should be ruled by us humans! Have you forgotten?”

The others did not dare make a sound against such a fierce aura.

Granbell rarely expressed his emotions, and because of that, they could tell how deep Granbell’s hatred and fury truly ran.

“I am tired. If this continues on, the human world will be destroyed, and in its place, Demon Lord Rimuru will have the entire world in the palm of his hand. If this is our fate, then I shall make my last stand. I am going all in for this wager. You people can follow your own will.”

Granbell had given the others time to contemplate their decision for the future.

Would they follow Granbell to fight against destiny, or surrender to Demon Lord Rimuru?

In order to prevent the Rosso bloodline from dying out, someone needed to sever all ties and become a hostile faction to the Rossos—only Dolan chose this option.

“My domain is far from the heat of battle. I shall be the last of the Rosso family and judge the history to come with fairness.”

Granbell approved of Dolan’s words. “Very well. I fear that I won’t have the opportunity to do this in the future, so I shall give my final words to you. It’s too late for me, but you must never hold a grudge.”

Granbell steeled his resolve and left Dolan with this advice. Dolan quietly wept and nodded. He then left the scene alone.

Johann knew this would be their final gathering, yet he had no regrets in his heart.

Granbell was the progenitor of the Rosso family. When considering the hardship he had already experienced, to Johann, sacrificing himself for the cause was nothing.

Cidre had the same thought.

And so, the three began planning their final scheme.

Granbell would manipulate Grandmaster Yuuki of the Freedom Association into confronting Luminas.

Cidre would dissolve the western defense network and allow the demons from the north to wage war against the Western Nations.

Johann, on the other hand, would sabotage the ‘Defensive Barrier’ that protected the capital of Ingracia and kill off key members of the Western Council. If it was possible, he aimed to kill the delegate of the Tempest Federation, hopefully antagonizing Demon Lord Rimuru and also worsening his relationship with Demon Lord Guy.

And so, human society would be plunged into chaos.

They would deal with the aftermath later. After all, their designated survivor, Dolan, would lead the restoration of society.

There might also be some nation that stood out and rose to power. Or perhaps someone would become humanity’s new hope and lead the masses.

Granbell seemed to have some other ideas, but Johann did not give too much thought to it.

“…Are you all fine with this? You do understand that I am sending you all to your deaths, right?”

“Why in the world would we object? I am also a member of the Rossos, and my heart rests with you, Grand Elder!”

“Me too. While my illness-ridden body may not accompany you to the end, I wish to be at least of some use.”

Granbell had asked to confirm their will, and both Johann and Cidre answered without hesitation.

There was a reason why Johann’s mind changed so quickly. The Rosso family naturally should follow the order of Granbell. Without his guardianship, the family would never have prospered. This was just how much the fate of the family relied on Granbell. It was obvious Granbell had decided to embrace his death and so the usually indecisive Johann made up his mind.

Dolan-dono appears heart-broken as well. It’s like a child being abandoned by his parents; surely his heart must be uneasy too—Johann thought to himself. In considering that viewpoint, perhaps he was rather happy in the end. He could bear the pride of the Rosso family and accept his final moments.

Johann followed Granbell’s orders and made contact with the ‘Apostles of Verte’ which previously conspired with Gavan. He promised to assist them.

The Apostles’ goal was to summon the ‘Green Deity’ that could plunge the world into anarchy. This mercenary band’s dream was to blossom during that chaotic state, an ideal that was completely self-centered.

Back to present time.

Johann’s mission was complete. The ‘Apostles of Verte’ had also clearly achieved their ambitions. Because their god—Demon Peer Mizeri—had answered their summoning.

Mizeri was more terrifying than some demon lords. She wouldn’t break a sweat in destroying the Kingdom of Ingracia.

Kukuku, even the supposed strongest unit of this nation, the magical inquisitors, froze at the sight of the demon. This country is doomed. Our nation of Rostia will probably be affected as well; I suppose I’ll just have to apologize to everyone in the next life. In satisfaction, Johann glanced around the meeting hall.

And what he saw next made him question his eyes.

Faced against Mizeri, the embodiment of horror, was a person that wore a gentle, conspicuous smile. The young man standing beside her seemed disinterested at the fact as well, completely at ease.

W-what’s wrong with those two?

Johann, shocked, recalled that those two were the delegates of Tempest: Testarossa and her servant, Moss.

“I see. What an interesting scheme, Johann-dono. Could it be that you wish to destroy this nation and plunge the world into chaos and war?”

Testarossa’s reaction displeased Johann quite a bit. He was even more upset at how casual and calm Testarossa was acting while facing Mizeri, the walking calamity that surpassed demon lords. “What if I did?”

Yet he quickly changed his view. While Testarossa may be strong as a monster, her arrogant confidence would soon be her downfall.

You can’t do anything with strength alone. You haven’t even seen through your opponent’s true strength. That ignorance will destroy you. When she finally realizes the reality of her situation, she’ll cry and plead. By purely imagining the sight of a distressed Testarossa begging for mercy, Johann’s heart was filled with an overwhelming sense of ecstasy.

“How very laughable. Your plan failed the very moment I was appointed military attaché.”

“Kukuku, what nonsense are you talking about?”

Hearing Testarossa’s words, a calm smile settled on Johann’s face. The more confident Testarossa was, the greater her despair would be when she got a taste of what was to come. With that belief, Johann eagerly anticipated that moment.

It was then that the Speaker interrupted their conversation.

“T-Testarossa-dono, this is no time to chit-chat. You must escape even if it’s by yourself, and you must report to His Majesty Rimuru as soon as possible!”

“Ara, Speaker-dono? What should I say to His Majesty Rimuru-sama?”

In the Western Nations, people’s comprehension of demons was not deep. Compared to the experts in the Eastern Empire, what they knew was barely the tip of the iceberg.

The Speaker was no exception. When he saw Mizeri, he was not aware of her species. He only knew that she was the subordinate of Guy Crimson, the symbol of terror, and therefore determined Mizeri to be a highly threatening individual.

Ignorance is a sin, but sometimes it was useful too.

Had the Speaker and the councilors known demons well enough, their hearts would have despaired the moment Mizeri appeared. They were lucky since they hadn’t fallen into that state yet, which was why the Speaker continued to earnestly beg Testarossa.

“Please inform him that one of Demon Lord Guy’s subordinates has invaded our land. Surely he will not leave the council for dead!”

The Speaker knew he was being too optimistic.

Regardless of how much Demon Lord Rimuru sought to coexist with humans, he would not purposely go against Demon Lord Guy just to secure his wish. It was a simple cost benefit analysis that anyone would understand.

Yet even with that being the case, the Speaker still wanted to have a glimmer of hope on this small possibility. He had seen Demon Lord Rimuru with his own two eyes and believed his words.

Perhaps if it is that emotional and overtly human demon lord, he may just defy logic and save us—despite knowing that his thought was absurd, the Speaker couldn’t help but to think so. That was the reason why he was still able to maintain a coherent frame of mind amidst the terror.

Testarossa smiled at the Speaker. “That’s why I am here.”

Although the Speaker didn’t understand what she meant by that for the longest time, he would soon enough. And he was not the only one confused about Testarossa’s words.

Johann felt the same. That composed, easygoing attitude of Testarossa had pushed him to his limit.

“Do you really think I’ll just sit by and let you interfere? Girard-dono, it’s about time to give them a reality check.”

However, Girard, as he was being ordered around by Johann, was also confused by the scene in front of him.

Why, why hasn’t Mizeri-sama made a move yet?

Ayn was Girard’s lieutenant, and she had lost consciousness the instant Demon Peer Mizeri was summoned. It likely cost much of her life force, but it was undoubtedly masterful work. The fact that she was even alive at all was commendable. Although, without the supernatural power of Mizeri, she would likely never wake up. While feeling proud of Ayn, Girard prepared to retreat once the opportunity presented itself.

With the unusual power of Mizeri, it’d be a piece of cake slaughtering everyone at the scene. Besides, even the capital of the Kingdom of Ingracia would soon become engulfed by the hellish flame that was about to come.

Girard was planning to flee with Ayn before that happened. He intended to sacrifice all the citizens of this city to their god, Mizeri. And with this contribution, the members of the ‘Apostles of Verte’ would surely be able to join the ranks of their deity. That was his plan.

However, things were going the opposite way of what Girard had envisioned. Ever since Mizeri showed up, she had been standing still and silently staring at Testarossa.

Finally, she decided to speak. “Unbelievable, Blanc. How did you manage to get a body?”

“Ara, that title sounds so desolate to me. Someone has already given me the wonderful name of ‘Testarossa.’ Wouldn’t you dislike it if people started calling you the green demon? No, Mizeri?”

“Y-you…got a name? How is that possible—”

Testarossa giggled. “Very possible it seems. It’s so kind of you to come all the way here to say hi, but unfortunately, I won’t lose to you in this state. It’d be quite amusing if you still intend to fight me. How about a thousand years of slumber as a parting gift from me?” she said provokingly with an elegant smile.

Not only did she obtain a body, but she even received a name.

And just like that, Testarossa had evolved into a demon peer, same as Mizeri.

They were now both on a level playing field.

At first glance, their combat abilities were on par with each other, but logically speaking, Testarossa, who only acquired her body recently, would be at a disadvantage.

That would have been the case if not for Testarossa’s bellicose personality. Mizeri, as Demon Lord Guy’s subordinate, mainly handled administrative affairs, whereas Testarossa, a primordial just like Mizeri, had been fighting for power every single day of her life.

There was no clear-cut way to compare either of them in combat experience. Furthermore, Testarossa’s subordinate, Moss, was here with her.

While I possess more magicules, I don’t want to risk fighting two demon peers. Moreover, my opponent is one half of the troublesome black and white duo. The duty Guy-sama gave me was just to create a disturbance at the capital, not risk my life trying to eliminate one of the primordials. I should report this problem to Guy-sama first.

Mizeri was very calm. She instantly recognized the difference in strength between her and her enemies, and determined the best course of action that the situation demanded.

“There is no need to provoke me like that, Bla—Testarossa. My target today is not you, but only to destroy the ‘Barrier’ over the capital. I think I achieved my goal.”

“Ara, are you trying to flee?”

“Indeed. My life belongs to Guy-sama. It is not something I can choose to throw away with my own free will.”

“I see. Then I look forward to our next encounter.”

To that declaration, Mizeri remained emotionless. “That is my line. Get used to your body soon. I won’t allow you to make excuses when you’re defeated.”

Testarossa’s smile deepened.

The two stared at each other for a while before Mizeri vanished.

“—Eh?” Girard couldn’t help but let out a gasp.

With her departure, she left behind a room full of baffled bystanders.

Their god—the supreme existence, the invincible, the omnipotent being—had been persuaded to leave by the councilor who only had a beautiful appearance going for her—or so it seemed in Girard’s eyes.

The ‘Apostles of Verte’ was merely a disposable tool to Mizeri. It was something she prepared on a whim to keep human societies under her surveillance and obtain information. There were plenty of replacements at the ready, so she was indifferent to the fates of Girard and the others.

She abandoned them without a second thought—but Girard refused to accept this reality.

“N-no way! Dammit, you made our god leave!”

Enraged, Girard swung his sword at Testarossa.

His elevated rank A abilities weren’t just for show. The swiftness of his sword was invisible to the average person.

Yet to someone like Testarossa, he moved like he was in slow motion. Besides, there was no need for her to do anything; Moss was with her. He would never ignore such insolence.

Familyg. With a sharp crack, Girard’s sword shattered in half. He was apprehended by Moss the very next moment.

“Don’t kill him. Same goes for that official, Johann.”

“But these people insulted Testarossa-sama—”

In the blink of an eye, Moss’s ear was sent flying away.

“Moss, are you asking me to repeat myself?”

He kneeled immediately, demonstrating regret for his misconduct. “I would not dare! To have given my opinion to Testarossa-sama, I thought too highly of myself!”

Testarossa had been in a good mood lately, which caused him to become careless for a second. She was actually very egocentric.

The same applied to not only Testarossa, but Ultima and Carrera as well. ‘Birds of a feather flock together’ was probably the best phrase that described them.

“Since you are aware of it, I shall forgive you this time. Ara ara, I have such a generous heart. Right, Moss? Wouldn’t you agree?”

“Definitely! You are absolutely correct!” Moss said cooperatively. He was a smart man after all. Even though he occasionally made mistakes like this, he had served Testarossa for over ten thousand years. That was an incredible achievement that no one could even hope of replicating.

And so, Johann, Girard and Ayn were captured. Even the soldiers on their side were arrested.

“H-how can this be…”

Girard finally collected his thoughts after losing to Moss. The conversation between Mizeri and Testarossa began slowly sinking in before he realized something crucial.

Our enemy was acknowledged as an equal by our god…? Blanc—could ‘Blanc’ be referring to the White Primordial?!

Girard knew of the primordial demons. That was why he was able to see through Testarossa’s hidden identity. As soon as he connected the dots, Girard plunged into a state of utter stupefaction. Now armed with the knowledge of what they had attempted to go against, he knew his soul would never see a day of rest. His ego as a strong individual meant nothing in front of the power of a primordial.

“Aha, AHAHAHAHAHAHA!” Girard laughed maniacally.

In a way, he had met an enviable end. Thus, both Girard and an unconscious Ayn were dragged away by the magical inquisitors.

Johann looked as though he had suddenly aged a few years as he laid lifelessly on the ground, rambling, “H-have I failed…? Even Granbell-sama’s wish, his final request…”

“Yes. There is nothing you can achieve,” Testarossa mocked, whispering into Johann’s ears, her words filled with spite.

When the sweet voice of Testarossa reached Johann’s eardrums, it completely numbed his heart.

“Dammit! DAMMIT! If-if it weren’t for you, our plan would have worked!”

“Ara, is that so? Then I’m terribly sorry to have interfered with your plan in the end. Perhaps this is fate and it wanted you to give up. Ara ara, looks like someone’s waiting behind you. Now please excuse me.”

Testarossa stroked her pale finger across Johann’s jaw before making way for the magical inquisitors, who were waiting to carry out their orders.

“N-no, stay away, stay away from me!”

The magical inquisitors remained silent throughout the process as they escorted Johann out.

“Stop it, oi, get your hands off me!” Johann shouted in front of an aloof crowd. “D-do you have any idea who I am?! Do you not know the consequences of your actions here?! My nation will not allow this to stand! You’re creating an international problem for yourselves!”

No one reacted. Not a single person was willing to lend him a helping hand.

That was only natural.

With all these witnesses present, Johann would have to answer for his actions.

“There’s no use crying—you have to pay the price for your crimes. Don’t worry, your friends will be with you too. You will all have a fun time together.”

“GO TO HELL YOU DEMON!”

Seeing Johann’s distress, Testarossa laughed happily. “Ufufufufufu, wonderful! There it is. How can I not be amused by a stray dog barking like that? Within the council, criminals are judged by a jury, and if your charge is ‘Inciting subversion of state power’ or ‘Conspiracy against one’s country,’ it is outside the jurisdiction of the council and instead will be handled by Ingracia. How unfortunate that I won’t have the right to punish you. Even though I could claim self-defense, you seem a bit too weak for me.”



Testarossa’s words were perfectly aligned with international law. Taking the law as an excuse, she merely utilized logic to force Johann into a corner. With Johann arrested, he would follow in the footsteps of Gavan: never to see the light of day again and eventually executed in secret.

Looking at the results, Testarossa single-handedly forced the demon that attempted to destroy the kingdom to back down, thus saving Ingracia and even all of the council members.

This incident cemented Testarossa’s status within the council. Both her intelligence and martial prowess were insurmountable. Even the Speaker began to regard Testarossa highly, and her reputation spread far and wide.

And so, Testarossa was able to conquer the West once and for all.

“Did he predict what would happen beforehand? Ah, Rimuru-sama is truly infallible! How wonderful, how truly wonderful,” Testarossa sighed.

“The extent of the lord’s wisdom is genuinely unfathomable,” added Moss.

“Indeed. But the incident could potentially cause Guy Crimson to take things seriously, and if that occurs…”

“We shall gather our strength. We must let the world know that no matter how fierce our enemies are, none will stand in the path of our lord!”

“Since you know this already, I don’t have much to add. You should work hard in order to reach his expectations. Remember to tell Cien the same.”

“Understood, my master!”

Testarossa nodded, satisfied, and gave a graceful smile.

The situation in the northern realm was going well too. Testarossa’s subordinate, Cien, went above and beyond to contain and control the battle before Elmesia’s Magus Order could arrive. Luckily, Guy wasn’t really trying to invade anyway, which meant the demons were quickly defeated and routed back to their domain.

And so, the disturbance in the West seemed to have drawn to a close.

But the true unrest had yet to even begin.

………

……

…

“Hey, Mizeri just contacted me,” said Guy, sounding rather dismayed. “When did the White Primordial get a name?”

“Oh, you mean Testarossa. She is among the many people that have learned how wonderful a person Rimuru-sama is,” Diablo explained proudly.

“All my men got defeated too. This prank was a complete failure.”

“It is only natural. Everything is going according to Rimuru-sama’s plan. You are merely a pawn in this game as well, Guy,” Diablo added. Again, unbeknownst to Rimuru, he was antagonizing Guy.

Had Rimuru been there, he would probably have squealed something along the lines of, “What the hell are you saying, you idiot!” and tried to stop Diablo at all costs.

“So, did that Rimuru give her the name ‘Testarossa’ too?”

“Yes, he did.”

“And the fact that Testarossa evolved into a demon peer after obtaining a body—”

“That was thanks to Rimuru-sama, of course.”

“…Right.”

Diablo’s smile widened whereas Guy’s headache worsened. Behind him, Raine was awaiting orders. Yet, upon realizing the severity of the situation, her face paled.

Oi oi oi, is this for real? The balance of power that had been maintained for thousands of years has been shattered to pieces…

Guy could only find the situation laughable.

The balance of power in different regions had always been subtly preserved. The three primordials had stood strong in their respective domains whilst the East and West were against each other. Furthermore, Luminas and Dagruel pressured each other from their respective domains as well.

Yet, this delicate balance was now completely obliterated.

Abruptly hit by an ominous feeling, Guy couldn’t help but ask Diablo, “Oi, if Testarossa emerged from the primordial trio, what happened to the other two?”

Diablo’s expression became smug. “Hmm, you mean Ultima and Carrera? Rimuru-sama prepared positions for both of them. They seem very happy about—”

Baffled, Guy quickly interrupted him. “Hold on, HOLD ON for a second!”

“What is it? I was about to explain the important part, you know?” Diablo was quite displeased as he was just about to brag.

“Eh, slow down now, is it a long story?” Whatever the answer was, Guy just didn’t want to spend all this time with him.

“Of course.”

“I’ll hear you out later. Who is this Ultima and Carrera…”

“Oh, Ultima is the Violet Primordial. Carrera is the Yellow Primordial. But if you don’t call them by their names, they won’t take kindly to it. Lately, it’s almost like they’ve forgotten their original titles.”

“I see…”

Guy was utterly gobsmacked.

Oi oi oi, what the hell is that brat Rimuru thinking? Guy thought to himself. It’s not impossible for the Black Primordial since he’s always been an oddball, but there’s no way the Violet and Yellow Primordial would yield so easily. Didn’t he mention the White Primordial too? That woman is the most prideful of all primordials… To think she would be willing to take orders from other people—

“Well,” Diablo casually interjected, “I was the one that invited them. I would welcome more jobs, but it’s pointless if that means I can’t take care of Rimuru-sama as a result. Wouldn’t you agree?”

“—Huh?”

Guy gave Diablo a weird look, as if saying, “Oi oi oi, what is this guy talking about?”

The absolute overlord, Guy, was completely dumbfounded at Diablo’s words.

“To put it simply, I wanted to push some of my chores onto other people—cough, cough, I mean, I wanted some companions to work with. So I invited that unemployed lot. Endlessly fighting like a bunch of idiots over power is so boring. That’s why I hoped they would mature a bit and come to Rimuru-sama’s aid!” Diablo declared in a haughty tone.

So you were behind everything! Seriously, this is all your fault—you’re the one who should grow up! Guy cursed internally.

“…So you invited those girls and Rimuru took them as subordinates, giving them names and physical bodies?”

“That’s right. They were very rude to Rimuru-sama at first. Now that I think about it, I wanted to kill them for that. But since they’re now useful, as long as Rimuru-sama doesn’t mind, I will forgive them.”

Diablo was weird enough already, which made Rimuru seem even weirder. That was Guy’s genuine opinion.

An average demon lord would not have been able to name a primordial. Such a drastic action was accompanied by an equal amount of danger. One would need to wager their life, or even their existence as a whole, to do it.

Essentially, if the primordials didn’t recognize your strength, they wouldn’t follow you, regardless. Your entire soul could potentially be consumed before you successfully named them.

What Rimuru did could no longer simply be described as ‘crazy’ or ‘overconfident.’

With that, Guy came to a conclusion. I suppose I should just talk with him directly.

“I’ll go hang out at Rimuru’s place next time.”

“Huh? That sounds troublesome. I refuse.”

You little shit—Guy clenched his fists. But he’d lose if he lost his temper now.

Diablo was a very special demon. Even if he were to be eliminated here, he would revive instantly. Knowing this well, Guy did not fall for Diablo’s taunts.

“It’s nothing really, I just want to hear more about all this from you, and this is certainly no place to chat. I heard from Dino that Rimuru’s domain is quite affluent. So, I want to check it out for myself too,” Guy said in a rather intimate tone as he wrapped his arm around Diablo’s shoulder.



“Pff—can’t help it with you. If that’s the case, I will welcome your visit. Surely, Rimuru-sama would be pleased to have you.”

Diablo’s mood improved dramatically when he heard Rimuru’s nation being praised. So much so that he permitted Guy’s visit.

Rimuru would definitely squeal upon learning this.

Later in the aftermath of these events, when Diablo reported this to Rimuru, the demon lord would think to himself: “This guy, why do you pick up all the bad traits from Shion…”

But not knowing things would go this way, Diablo promised Guy.

“Since you are here, I’ll be going now.”

“Right. Whatever happens here, Rimuru-sama will surely take care of it.”

“I guess. Please send my regards to Rimuru.”

“No problem. See you next time. I’ll look forward to our next meeting.”

And so, Guy left the scene.

Diablo gave a sigh of relief.

“Looks like I managed to pull through this time. There’s no telling how things would go if Guy decided to interfere. Even I would have trouble dealing with him. Kufufufufufu, I must become stronger—”

The sound of Diablo’s laughter echoed in the empty space.

A fierce battle raged within the inner sanctum.

Louis’s innocuous hand-chops slashed through any obstacles. Furthermore, it was accompanied by a shockwave which closed in on Laplace, who was fleeing further away. However, Laplace was merely evading, almost teasingly, with a relaxed smile on his face.

“Right, right, are ya Roy’s big bro? Yer twins? Then ya can stop fighting already, ya won’t be able to beat me!”

Laplace was so unconcerned that he could run around dodging attacks, and still have the strength to crack jokes.

Louis remained emotionless to Laplace’s teasing. He didn’t mind that his attacks were being avoided; he simply continued to swing his hands at Laplace.

At some point, the two ended up fighting outside of the tomb. With Laplace constantly avoiding Louis’s attack, it was only natural that they would wind up here.

“As you just said, I am Louis’s twin. Our power was quite alike to each other, so was our appearance. The only difference was that Roy was more aggressive while I didn’t have much emotion, that is all the difference. However, there was one aspect that I am a lot stronger than him in, that is, I have good eyes.”

“The hell is ‘good eyes’?”

“I can closely analyze my opponent’s skill, body language and his focus of attack. That is why I clearly see that you have been looking for an opening on me ever since we started.”

“…The hell, so ya really are better than yer bro. But having a good pair of eyes alone ain’t gonna beat me!”

“Don’t sound so certain. By the way, my name is Louis; please do not call me his bro. To be honest, I was not that close to Roy.”

“Hmph—fine. It’s none of my business anyway.”

Amidst the fierce combat—or rather, Laplace evading Louis’s pressing attacks and casually responding—it was not Louis who was observing him; instead, Laplace was the one analyzing Louis. It was evident from the expression of his eyes.

“Enough of this, aren’t you getting tired? Take a good nap for now,” Louis declared.

His attacks began to intensify.

“Told ya it’s useless.”

“Is that so? Then allow me to go even further.”

His tone did not change at all, yet Laplace had a bad feeling about this. His instincts were surprisingly accurate in times like these. He instantly darted away from the scene with overly theatrical movements.

His judgement was on the mark.

Louis’s attack split apart and decimated the location where Laplace was standing just a moment ago.

“—Uh! What is this power…?”

The latest attack held immense destructive potential. Had Laplace continued to underestimate Louis, he likely would not have been able to react quick enough, sustaining severe injuries as a result.

“Phew—I’m finally getting the hang of this. I’m surprised you managed to dodge that strike. Looks like you are not a simple man after all.”

“Ya wanted me to get careless so ya could take me out with that shot, right?”

“Well, I can’t say I didn’t. But I can still beat you without underhanded tricks like that.”

“What are ya on about?”

Laplace had slaughtered Roy. At the time, Roy had underestimated Laplace, but even if he hadn’t, Laplace’s strength was still far greater than that of Roy’s.

Regardless, Laplace did not get careless. Even when Roy acted as the body-double of Demon Lord Luminas, his power still rivalled Kazalim’s. That was the undeniable truth. Kazalim was like a parent to Laplace and the clowns, and there was no way Laplace would let his guard down against someone of his caliber.

“Just now, that was the enhanced version of ‘Blood Raine.’ Its magic aura was purposely hidden to lower my opponent’s guard. Although, once they’ve seen it in action, it is impossible to pull it off again.” Louis decided to explain his skill to Laplace, even though he was essentially showing his hand.

Yet hearing this worsened the ominous feeling in Laplace’s heart.

This is bad. Is he stalling? The hell is this guy’s goal?

Laplace’s instinct told him that he was still in danger. He determined that he would fall into Louis’s trap at this rate, and decided to pull out his trump card immediately. There was no time for hesitation. A moment of indecision could cost him his life.

“—And that is why you will die here!” Louis roared as Laplace’s surroundings exploded.

The shockwaves from the explosion were concentrated at the center region where Laplace was standing. He had nowhere to run, since the ‘Blood Ray’ missiles had already locked onto him.

The victor had been decided.

Anyone would reach the same conclusion if they saw it.

The flames burnt fiercely.

A humanoid figure collapsed at the center.

“What a pity. Roy and I were the same person; it was Luminas-sama’s power that separated us into two. Roy’s death had returned my original power back to me.”

In the past, there was once an extremely violent ‘Bloody Lord’ that no one dared to challenge. It was Luminas who subjugated the man and recruited him into her service. But because of his sadistic and violent nature, he constantly clashed with Luminas’s other subordinates. It was then that Luminas decided to bisect the person, naming one of them as her right-hand man, the pope, and the other as her body-double, the demon lord.

In other words, Louis had finally regained his old powers and became complete again. He was several times stronger than before. Even if Laplace’s power was above that of Roy’s, Louis still had confidence in winning.

And that was why—

“Terrifying. That was a close call.”

Louis felt a bit surprised to see Laplace raising his body and standing up.

There was no way Laplace would ignore such a good opportunity.

“Run away now, Footman, or ya gonna get killed!”

“Hehehe, while I’m not content yet, I may really end up that way if I continue.”

Footman was devastated by cuts and bruises, courtesy of Gunther. Gunther was the strongest among the ‘three Archdukes’ under Luminas’s command. Even though he wasn’t nearly as powerful as Louis in his complete form, he was still capable of rivalling Footman.

Laplace was able to meticulously analyze this aspect even during his battle with Louis. It would have been too easy for him to flee by himself, but there was no way Laplace was going to leave Footman to his own demise.

Even if I go all out here, I still won’t be able to take all of them out. Footman will probably die before that too. That being the case, it’s best for us to run away as soon as possible. We’ve done our job of stalling the enemies, so there’s no need to risk our necks any longer! Laplace concluded.

He intentionally spoke up to distract Louis before taking action. His plan worked, and so both Laplace and Footman managed to escape with their lives.

Thus, only Luminas and Maria Rosso remained inside the tomb.

Luminas seemed to be holding back against Maria’s attacks; she was not fighting seriously. The fact that the being before her, Maria, was able to hold her own in a lightning-fast battle was proof in itself that she was a fake.

Yet, even so—

Luminas could still sense the benevolent aura that Maria emanated.

Granbell probably preserved Maria’s body and then used her corpse to create this death golem—no, that’s not right. This carcass has no free will. This must be a familiar summoned by the necromancy spell ‘Raise Undead.’ To have resorted to such forbidden sorcery—has that man really fallen that low…?

Anyone would pray having lost their loved ones…

Pray that their loved ones would return.

But no one could grant this impossible wish.

Luminas could understand Granbell’s feeling as to why he resorted to heretical crafts like that, but her mind could only relate on a hypothetical level. Luminas was far from death, and therefore she could never truly understand sorrow and grief.

Granbell and Maria were a very intimate couple.

Maria was a Saint’s priestess, or Saintess, that supported the Hero Gran throughout his life. Gran wanted to share the burden of Saintess Maria, and thus they got stuck with each other. The two were so close that it made Luminas, who was their enemy at the time, jealous of them.

It demonstrated the extent of Granbell’s resolve to have turned his precious Maria into a familiar. However, she was abnormally strong, so he must have casted other dark spells on her. Luminas came to this realization because Maria had used countless special abilities during their duel. It was like she was invoking several Unique Skills at once, and even Luminas was having a hard time fighting her.

While it’s quite magnificent, it’s still too weak. Granbell probably knew she couldn’t defeat me. Then, his goal here must be—a sense of uneasiness suddenly washed over Luminas as she pondered. She felt like she had overlooked something very important—

“Luminas-sama, the intruder has escaped. Louis is currently pursuing them, and I shall depart to join him—”

Gunther had returned to report to Luminas. Yet he stopped halfway, just as Luminas finally noticed what was wrong.

Something was missing in the room.

Something very important…

Gunther saw it; Luminas’s heterochromatic eyes simultaneously darted to the same place.

—The carefully guarded Holy Ark from within the depths of the tomb had disappeared—

Luminas was struck speechless. She was in complete shock and denial of what was in front of her.

This shouldn’t have happened.

Stupefied, Luminas took a direct hit by Maria.

“Luminas-sama—!”

Gunther’s anxious voice reached her ears, yet Luminas had no time to be concerned. The pain quickly spread across her body, but she welcomed the stimulation to her senses; it helped her keep her cool. Part of Luminas’s mind calmed down and began to think critically once again.

That part forced her to accept the reality of the situation. Although she desperately wanted to deny the truth, she managed to pull herself together with her calm, analytical mind.

And the reality was that the coffin made of holy particles—the Ark of Holy Power—had been stolen.

Overwhelmed with rage, Luminas pierced through Maria’s chest.

Luminas unleashed the mana from within her body with a furious roar. “GRANBELL, HAVE YOU REALLY COME TO DO THIS?! YOU DARE—YOU DARE TEST MY LIMIT, GRAN—!”

The tomb was instantly destroyed by a tsunami of immense power. Luminas’s surroundings were filled with swirls of chaotic mana, to the point that she had become an aura of death.

“Gunther—!”

“Yes, I am here to serve!”

“Find them. Flush out the invaders at all costs!”

“Understood!”

No more words were needed.

Gunther acted immediately, having understood Luminas’s will.

Facing an enraged Luminas meant that even Gunther could lose his life if he weren’t careful.

If this mission fails, Lubelius may face destruction…Gunther thought as he sprinted out as fast as he could.

Luminas was the only one left at the scene and was having a difficult time trying to simply suppress her anger. She began analyzing in a composed manner, knowing that if she were too reckless, it would only worsen the situation. Her thoughts needed to be detached from her emotions—to Luminas, this was only natural.

Nonetheless, the incident had shocked her greatly. This can’t do. If it’s not carefully protected before the time comes, it’ll likely lead to this world’s destruction. It’d be something even I won’t be able to handle…

That object—the Holy Ark—had been entrusted to her by an important friend. If she were negligent in its management, the world could face an unprecedented catastrophe as a consequence. That was why it had been sealed tight.

Luminas calmly scrutinized the current state of affairs.

Only she could remove the seal imposed on the Holy Ark. The holy particles would burn even the original caster, Luminas; an example of how powerful and terrifying the ‘Barrier’ was.

Thus, the problem was…how could something like that be stolen…?

—Who could it be? To have taken that item means this person was quite capable, or at least strong enough to rival me.

In other words, this individual’s strength was on par with the demon lords.

The chaos Granbell incited at the Grand Cathedral must have been a distraction. The fact that Granbell entrusted them with his key goal meant this person was powerful. He definitely had enough faith in the other person to let them steal the Holy Ark while allowing himself to play bait.

In this wager, Granbell had won.

—No, perhaps there is still time. I can’t show weakness at this point. Compared to that, right now I should…

What did Granbell want with the Holy Ark?

She needed to confirm this first and foremost.

Luminas hadn’t shared any information about the Holy Ark with Granbell. It was confidential information. Even Gunther and Louis only possessed a surface-level understanding of it and the young girl sealed inside.

Granbell was willing to sacrifice all of his aces. Just from that knowledge alone, anyone could see that his resolve was more than just strong.

Luminas could clearly tell that something was off.

As long as I can achieve my true goal, nothing else matters—Luminas could feel this hateful sentiment from him.

“Very well, I shall confirm your true intentions first,” Luminas muttered and turned her gaze towards the cathedral.

It seemed like Leon had caught on to the meaning behind my words. He was simply playing along and crossed swords with me.

To the eyes of bystanders, this certainly appeared to be an actual battle. If I were too careless, I could actually be killed by the slashes.

On that note, did he really understand me?

The look he gave told me that he probably knew Granbell was behind everything. We just had to wait for the right moment. And before that happened, we just needed to pretend to duel. At least that was how I envisioned it. Yet, Leon’s swordsmanship refused to give me any room to breathe.

His speed was extremely fast. While Hinata’s rate of attack was swift, Leon was no slower. He had a very beautiful stance, typical of practicing orthodox swordsmanship.

I, on the other hand, had incorporated some personal tastes to my swordsmanship after learning from Hakurou. Since using a sword was not my only means of combat, I couldn’t help but add my own flair. Moreover, with Raphael-san’s monitoring, it wouldn’t be too unconventional.

In any case, that didn’t really matter; I was just complimenting how clean Leon’s attacks were.

It truly made me question whether he was actually planning to kill me with his attacks or not. In addition, Leon’s face was essentially an emotionless mask. That meant I couldn’t tell if he had killing intent by looking at him, which began to really concern me that my message hadn’t gotten across.

«Report. No problem. According to analysis of ‘Predict Future Attack,’ he is striking in coordination with you.»

Ah, what a relief.

I’ll let this continue while Raphael-sensei takes over with automatic battle mode.

Putting that aside, there was something else that was unsettling. I had been getting feedback about small earthquakes. At first, I suspected it was plate displacement—but it was quite intense. My guess was that it was Luminas’s doing, who was currently absent.

There were problems everywhere.

This unrest was no longer just a minor incident. It was already far beyond just the simple involvement of other nations. Had I not been the person at the center of all this, a complaint would have definitely been filed to escalate the whole thing into an international affair.

—Although, Luminas probably wouldn’t let a complaint affect her anyway.

Putting that aside, Diablo had yet to return.

Shion and Ranga were struggling against an insect type monster called Razul.

While Hinata and Granbell appeared to be on par with each other, I felt that Granbell still had more strength to spare. It was obvious to me that if the battle were to continue any further, the odds would soon turn against Hinata.

The various battles, as a whole, were not ideal. It was almost impossible for me to judge which one I should handle first.

As I was analyzing the battleground, I detected an intense mana explosion underground. It was from Luminas.

The stone tiling of the Grand Cathedral floor was blown away, breaking open a circular hole with a diameter of two meters. A pillar of light shot from it and instantly evaporated the ceiling as it dissipated in the sky.

The power of it was insane, but such an attack was probably a piece of cake for Luminas.

“Granbell, it looks like you are seriously trying to be my enemy.”

Luminas emerged from the hole in the ground while holding a beautiful woman. And as soon as she came out, she interrogated Granbell. Her killing intent was palpable.

Looks like the situation is changing.

Leon seemed to bear the same thought as he turned his attention to Luminas.

“Kukuku, as expected from Luminas-sama. Even my familiar was not able to stop you. I had to infuse it with the power of many otherworlders, and it was my greatest masterpiece.”

“Foolish man. No matter how much power you infuse into that knockoff, a mindless golem can never compete with the real thing. You should know something like that best yourself.”

“Of course I know.”

Granbell was still very calm in front of an agitated Luminas.

Hinata’s strikes against him had become even faster, yet Granbell parried them easily.

I knew from experience that Hinata had some way of stealing Skills from her opponents, but it seemed that she was unable to invoke it this time.

Speaking of which, Arts and Skills were different things. You wouldn’t be able to use an Art immediately, even if you stole it. You could only master them through years and years of training and accumulation of experience.

The reason why Granbell was so strong was probably due to exactly that—years of training and research. His center of gravity did not shift an inch, maintaining his balance like a steady mountain.

Leon and I whispered to each other, “Impressive. Looks like he wasn’t bluffing when he said that he was an ex-Hero.”

“Umm, this was a little bit unexpected.”

We were ignored as Luminas and Granbell continued to speak.

“What in the world are you planning to have done this—” Luminas said while gently laying the woman in her arms down.

She looked like she had fallen asleep. No, she was already dead. As the name suggested, she had merely been turned into a familiar through the manipulation of her corpse. Since she did not have a ‘soul,’ no matter how much energy was inserted into her, it was meaningless.

I knew this point very well.

“—Maria has already passed away, and yet you chose to desecrate her like this!”

Luminas apparently knew this woman.

Was her name Maria?

She looked quite similar to Mariabell…could she be…

“Because it is necessary. Everything I have done was for this exact moment.”

Facing a confused Luminas, Granbell took off the glove on his left hand, revealing an engraving on it. It began to glow, and responding to it was the body of Maria, which also started to shimmer along.

“What are you doing—?!” Luminas questioned loudly, but this unfolding event was undoubtedly on everyone’s mind.

Leon and I stopped to observe.

At this point, keeping up this facade with each other would just look ridiculous. I almost couldn’t remember why we were fake fighting in the first place.

An unbelievable phenomenon was occurring right in front of us. Maria’s body turned into a beam of light and was absorbed into the engraving on Granbell’s hand. Soon after, Granbell’s body quickly began filling up with power.

It was not only his magicule content. His physical body also seemed to enhance. Granbell’s cells were now rejuvenated; his white hair transformed into a shiny golden color, and his withered skin regained their elasticity.

The Hero of the past had returned—a young Granbell Rosso.

His eyes were sharp.

“—I understand now, you…you even put my love energy into Maria’s body!” Luminas shouted while Granbell nodded in confirmation.

I recalled that love energy was the power to help maintain one’s youth. Was that power originally granted to Granbell now fully restored in him?

Whatever the case may be, the end result was the Granbell in front of us.

“Luminas-sama—no, Luminas. Our duel has yet to be settled. I remembered that I can’t die before this is all over. Now that Mariabell is dead, my ambition has changed, but I still intend to complete one final wish!”

“You scum!”

“Don’t you underestimate me now!”

Two people responded to Granbell, and they were Luminas and Hinata, respectively.

Granbell, now revitalized, turned his head towards Hinata.

“Ah yes. Hinata, there are still things that I’ve yet to teach you. You are the most talented among all the students I’ve taught. You have always been ambitious and worked hard to hone your skill. Outstanding is not high enough of a praise for you. However—” Granbell casually swung his hand, releasing an unbelievable attack.

“Melt Slash—?! No way! Can you really manipulate spiritrons like that without chanting?!”

Hinata sure was impressive to have dodged that unscathed, but her accomplishment paled in comparison to how Granbell was able to unleash the ultimate holy sword art with ease. It was a feat simply beyond imagination.

He had become an unthinkable monster.

“Hinata, in the past, I was very confused about why you couldn’t become a Hero. One cannot dream of becoming a Hero through talent and hard work alone. Without the endorsement of spirits, it is impossible to obtain the credential. That said, however, you were endorsed by spirits, and yet…”

“How unfortunate then. So what if I was endorsed by the spirits? I simply can’t become what is impossible.”

“Had you awoken as a Hero, it would have surely helped with my ambition. Allow me to give you a word of advice. Is there darkness in your heart already? You killed someone close to you, haven’t you? Your parent, sibling, or perhaps a friend?”

“SHUT UP!!”

Hinata had previously kept her distance in order to dodge the ‘Melt Slash,’ but now she charged forward to close in on Granbell. Her eyes were brimming with rage. Granbell’s words probably hit a nerve.

The clashing of swords resounded.

Granbell remained still. Instead, it was Hinata who was sent flying away.

“Uh—!”

The difference in strength was too overwhelming. Comparing Hinata to Granbell was like comparing an infant to an adult. I could barely believe my eyes.

“You could not accept a light spirit into yourself. Overcome it. The darkness in your heart is nothing more than an illusion fabricated by your own mind. You must forgive your past self and be proud of the life you lead now. Then, you shall see the light—”

“I TOLD YOU TO SHUT UP!!” Hinata shouted frantically as an expressionless Granbell watched on.

“How regretful, Hinata. Had there been more time, I could have given you the proper guidance. If you cannot understand my words, then you shall experience it in person. If you cannot protect what you yourself want to protect, then you are delusional to think you could save the world.”

This is bad—my instincts alerted me.

This conversation put everyone’s attention on Hinata.

If Granbell had calculated all of this, his goal would be—

«Warning. According to results of ‘Predict Future Attack,’ his target is—»

Once Granbell swung his sword, the ‘Disintegration’ released from his slash could not be stopped. Rather than a slash, it was more like a strike—something akin to a ‘Melt Strike.’ The strike would travel at nearly the speed of light and piece straight through its target.

This was why I bolted towards that kid.

Yet according to my calculations, I wouldn’t make it in time, even at full speed. But perhaps if I activated ‘Gluttonous King Beelzebuth’ and consumed the entire space in front of me…

I could not capture spiritrons traveling at the speed of light. But since I knew that his target was Chloe, I should be able to make it.

“Chloe—!” I shouted.

Then it was all over.

Hinata took action first. Without a hint of hesitation, she jumped in between Chloe and Granbell’s attack. Sacrificing herself, she let Granbell’s ‘Melt Strike’ hit her directly in the chest.

It instantly pierced through, and Hinata coughed up blood as she fell to the ground. However, this merely reduced some momentum of the beam as it continued to approach Chloe.

Unexpectedly, another individual jumped into action right after Hinata. It was Venom. Just like Hinata, he planned to sacrifice himself in order to protect Chloe. Likely out of loyalty for Diablo’s order, Venom had been extremely focused this whole time to ensure the children’s safety. That was why he managed to make it in time.

“Guu, that hurts—!”

He seemed pretty energetic even with a gaping hole in his stomach.

As expected from demons; so long as their ‘soul’ remained intact, they would be perfectly fine even if their bodies were destroyed. It might have been a different story if Granbell’s target was Venom, but that was not a question I had time for.

I managed to make it thanks to the extra time Hinata and Venom bought. I consumed the entire space in front of Chloe. With that, I appeared in an instant. Now I just had to use ‘Absolute Defense’ of ‘Covenant King Uriel’ to protect Chloe.

“Eh, Rimuru-sensei? Hinata…oneechan…?”

Chloe only paid attention to Hinata, and while it was kind of rude to Venom, I couldn’t blame her; I was concerned about Hinata too.

Luminas ran towards Hinata to inspect her wounds. “Hinata, are you all right?”

“Hinata-oneechan, you can’t die—!”

“Oi, Chloe!”

I wasn’t fast enough to stop her before Chloe bolted away. The rest of the children wanted to follow her, so I swiftly put them to sleep using ‘Paralyzing Breath.’ I gave Venom a healing potion and instructed him to protect the children.

“C-Chloe, you say? Is it really…Chloe…?”

Leon seemed to be acting a bit strange, but I didn’t have time to worry about it.

I chased after Chloe and reached Hinata.

On one hand, I was keeping my guard against Granbell, whilst on the other, I was examining Hinata’s situation.

—Eh, this is…

“Oi, Luminas…”

“Quiet! The spiritron corrosion is progressing too fast!”

Although her superficial wounds were being healed, Hinata grew weaker and weaker regardless. The spiritrons were destroying her spiritual body. At this rate, even her astral body would start eroding. If that happened, even she—

It was then that Hinata opened her eyes slightly.

“G-good! You’re doing great, Hinata, stay awake now!”

“—No, Luminas-sama, I-I—cough!”

Shit.

Hinata would be in mortal danger if this continued. But even so, Luminas, who was more skilled at holy magic than me, could not drag Hinata back from limbo.

Granbell’s skill truly was deadly.

“C-Chloe, it’s good that you are unhurt…”

Despite the blood dribbling from her mouth, Hinata managed to hold herself up. She had a will of steel. Even though her eyes were unfocused now, a smile still hung on her face.

Hinata extended her right hand to Chloe. It was trembling. She held out her ‘Moonlight Rapier’ and a bracelet—the ‘Holy Spirit Armament.’ “…Chloe, I’ll leave it to you. Still, as your Master…it seems that I couldn’t do anything, but you’ll be able to… You’ll be able to surpass me—”

Hinata’s sentences were broken up, but she was able to convey the heart of her message to the weeping Chloe.

“Hinata…oneechan…”

Chloe reached out her shivering hands to touch Hinata—

And in the next second—

Hinata’s body began to glow, with the light seemingly drawn to Chloe’s hands.

Am I seeing things—?

Even Luminas was quiet.

Or rather…time had frozen for a brief instant…

Chloe’s cry reached my ears. “Y-you are lying! I didn’t know about this! Why?! It’s not time yet!”

“Oi, Chloe?” As I called out, Chloe vanished without a trace, as if she were never here to begin with.

—I recovered swiftly.

What happened just now?

“Chloe? Chloe, where are you? Rimuru…damn you, what did you do to Chloe?!” Leon demanded as he clutched my shoulder, yet I was equally confused. Where did Chloe go?

“Uh, no, I have no clue…”

Could she really have just disappeared?

Seeing how I was behaving, Leon seemed to believe the truth behind my words. He began to anxiously turn his head around in search of her.

I, on the other hand, felt incredibly shocked.

What just happened? I had absolutely no idea.

«—Unknown. Situation is abnormal. No information can be obtained regarding what occurred with individual ‘Chloe Aubert.’»

To my surprise, even the usually reliable Wisdom King Raphael offered no information about the situation. Nevertheless, I didn’t even have time to be dazed.

Luminas wasn’t surprised about the disappearance of the young girl at all. To her, the most important matter was lying in front of her—her precious companion.

Luminas’s resurrection spell had no effect, and instead evaporated in mid-air. It baffled her.

“Why?! She didn’t die for long, so why is it…”

—No, Luminas could see it.

While Hinata’s body was restored to perfection, the most important part of her, her ‘soul,’ had vanished.

“Hinata, I am so sorry. To have let this happen to you when I am here…”

A single tear escaped from Luminas’s eye. Yet, it was this exact moment that someone decided to speak up, spoiling the heartfelt scene.

“Quit mourning already. Everything has been going according to plan. This one just now went extremely well, Luminas.”

Under these circumstances, only one person—Granbell—was laughing gleefully. Obviously, this enraged Luminas. Hinata was dead, and Luminas didn’t even get the time to grieve.

“UNFORGIVABLE, I WILL NEVER FORGIVE YOU. I WILL TEAR YOU APART!” Luminas roared furiously. The flare of rage reddened her face.

Her precious Hinata had been taken away right in front of her eyes.



Yet she could do nothing. Feelings of powerlessness and desperation swarmed her mind. The level of anger was perhaps comparable to when her old kingdom was destroyed by Veldora. Luminas, the demon lord, was in distress.

This reminder of her past trauma evoked Luminas’s lust for strength, and it was the last straw that broke the camel’s back.

Her great emotional turmoil prompted some sort of change within Luminas, who had always suppressed her inner feelings. She had perfected all her skills. However, she’d never been able to ascend to the pinnacle of the world. Until now. The ‘Voice of the World’ resonated in the air, ringing in the silence of her evolution.

«Confirmed. Conditions satisfied. Unique Skill ‘Lust’ has evolved to Ultimate Skill ‘Lustful King Asmodeus.’»

At that moment, the power within Luminas soared to new heights, making her much more vicious and violent than ever—she had reached the realm of the rulers of heaven.

Demon Lord Luminas’s evolved Skill—‘Lustful King Asmodeus’—commanded “Life and Death.”

Luminas awakened this power as a result of her feeling helpless at Hinata’s death. However, Luminas did not react to her newfound power at all. She instinctively knew that, at this point in time, this Skill meant nothing.

“It doesn’t even matter anymore! It’s too late…if it wasn’t useful when I needed it most, then it is a meaningless power to me—!” Ignoring even the ‘Voice of the World,’ Luminas’s fury continued burning. “You wish to finish your duel with me, don’t you?”

“Indeed, Luminas. You’ve evolved too, haven’t you? It was unexpected, but I am happy for you.”

Luminas’s heterochromatic red and blue eyes glowed, much like that of a monster. As she glared at Granbell, they swirled with hate. Inexplicably, the face of the girl that had vanished suddenly flashed through her mind. Luminas chased the stray thought out of her head.

“This is different from what I’ve been told—but that hardly matters now. I shall send you to your maker, Granbell—!”

And so, Luminas stood against Granbell.

After over a thousand years of entangled fate, they began their final showdown.

I could only watch silently at how Luminas dealt with the issue. Even though she employed a textbook example of her resurrection spell, it failed to make a difference. It was a shocking scene to say the least.

Basically, as long as one’s soul was safe, resurrection should have been able to revive them regardless of their spiritual or astral body.

So how come it didn’t work…?

«Answer. The ‘soul’ of individual ‘Hinata Sakaguchi’ has disappeared.»

…No…soul?

Actually, I noticed that too.

This was the second time that Hinata had fallen, yet there was a distinct difference compared to last time.

Luminas probably realized the same thing as well.

Normally, one’s soul wouldn’t disappear so quickly. Was it possible that something went wrong, and we didn’t recognize it? Perhaps Luminas was holding onto that tiny sliver of hope.

With that being said, it still didn’t appear to have worked. I never expected Luminas to fall into a panic like that. The intimacy of her relationship with Hinata must have been beyond my understanding.

I couldn’t excuse myself of this outcome either.

My mind had become a jumbled mess. How could something like this happen—I thought to myself.

But now was not the time for reflection.

“This is different from what I’ve been told—but that hardly matters now. I shall send you to your maker, Granbell—!” Luminas yelled. I jolted at her outburst, realizing that I had been dozing off this entire time.

What the hell am I doing? Especially since this is a live battlefield.

It was practically suicide.

I can grieve later. I have to do what I can right now.

Luminas’s words sounded a bit strange, but I could look into it later.

Keep calm, just keep calm.

This wasn’t over yet. If I acted recklessly, Hinata’s sacrifice and everyone’s efforts would be all for nothing. Even though I was forcing myself to do it, I still managed to switch up my mindset. Perhaps, had Luminas shouted a bit later, the situation would have worsened—the reason being the huge explosion at the Grand Cathedral that just occurred.

The bright light and dust storm caused by the explosion rushed to the central area. It rapidly swept across the area, but compared to the recent lightspeed battle, it was rather sleep-inducing.

I acted calmly, trying to protect the children and band members. I peeked in Shion and Ranga’s direction, as I was worried about them.

Apparently, Diablo had returned without me noticing and created a ‘Barrier’ to protect them.

“Kufufufufu, I was late.”

“No, you’re just in time!” I thanked Diablo.

By the way, what surprised me was Shion. Ranga and Diablo both noticed the explosion, yet it seemed that Shion’s attention was purely devoted to her enemy. Her expression was terrifyingly serious, and her face was flustered, seemingly mesmerized amidst all the bloodshed. It was a strangely sexy and eye-catching sight on the battlefield.

Well, never mind that.

They were being cornered by Razul, but at least they were holding their own in the fight. Thus, I let Shion and Ranga continue their battle against Razul.

With that, I decided to find the source of the explosion.

I soon felt an immense wave of youki.

The aura was so evil that a chill ran down my spine.

This was a lot worse than an ominous sign.

The oppressive atmosphere was as heavy as lead, like if the sky was crashing down—eh, why did this aura feel like the greater spirit that had once merged with Chloe?

While similar, there were subtle differences. However, the immense presence it exuded was exactly like the one in Chloe.

«Warning. Target possesses a material body. Abnormal power detected—limit is similar to the power of individual ‘Veldora.’»

Holy moly. Now that’s a real monster!

Unlike before, the result was no longer incalculable, but this knowledge wasn’t very comforting at all.

If it was just rampaging based on instinct like the Chaos Dragon, I might be able to handle it. On the other hand, if this enemy possessed intelligence, I could only surrender. Furthermore, if it had combat experience…the thought alone was terrifying. Perhaps I would see defeat before I could even get the chance to put up a fight. That power was several magnitudes higher than mine.

Unfortunately, I had a sneaking suspicion that I most likely would have to fight it head-on.

Is this what despair feels like?

Shortly after, the smoke dissipated. Standing there was a peerless beauty. Stark naked like a newborn, her eyes were closed as she stood silently. Her long, silver-black hair drifted down her head, whilst she was surrounded by shimmering light. She had a beautiful body that was the stuff of dreams. I couldn’t help but be mesmerized.

—It was a little untimely to be dazed.

“The one who stole my Holy Ark, is this your doing?! And you just had to unseal the holy particles and awaken the consciousness of ‘Chronoa’ too…” Luminas shouted in a certain direction, where a familiar figure appeared.

It was Yuuki.

As I suspected, he was behind everything.

While a part of me really wanted him to be innocent, it seemed that Wisdom King Raphael-san was right. Nevertheless, if you asked me who I trusted, it would undoubtedly be Raphael-san.

That explained why I wasn’t surprised at all.

“So, it did have something to do with you?” I questioned coldly.

Yuuki didn’t look guilty in the slightest, and instead arrogantly replied, “Tsk, did I get caught? Never mind though, this is fine.”

So this was his true nature. Judging by his words, he seemed quite reckless.

Behind Yuuki were two unfamiliar majins, both wearing masks.

One had an ‘asymmetric, with a pretentious attitude mask’ and the other, an ‘angry-looking mask’—they were probably Laplace and Footman from the ‘Moderate Clown Troupe.’

I had my suspicions for a long time, but it appeared that they really were in league with Yuuki.

“And you must be Luminas. I am Yuuki Kagurazaka, a pleasure to meet you.”

“Silence! How did you manage to break the seal?”

“To answer your question, I have a very special attribute. My ‘Anti-Skill’ can nullify all magic and special abilities.”

“—I see. You are quite bold to give that information so blatantly.”

Luminas, biting her lip, glared at Yuuki. Still, her actual attention was entirely focused on Granbell. The two of them were both on equal footing. Neither could find an opening on the other.

Moreover, Granbell was looking at the black-haired girl too. And just like Luminas, he was responding to all of her attacks.

In terms of skill, the battle between the strong was indescribable.

“I suppose so. Anyhow, since Rimuru-san already knows this Skill, there’s no need for me to hold back. By the way, I also have a question to ask. Not you, but for Granbell-san over there.” Yuuki spoke in a casual manner, but he didn’t let down his guard. His eyes had been carefully surveilling his surroundings the whole time.

“Kukuku, I can practically guess what your question is, but regardless, speak your mind.”

Since both Leon and I were free to move, Yuuki wouldn’t be able to escape so easily. Though, that was assuming Yuuki planned to run away. Even so, I was confident that he would definitely try to flee.

I still couldn’t figure out why Yuuki would be here, right at this moment. It led me to believe that things probably hadn’t turned out the way Yuuki wanted to today.

Nonetheless, it’d be dangerous to act now without getting a clear picture of the situation. I could only try to deduce what was going on from Yuuki and Granbell’s exchange.

“While I was told that the Holy Ark contained the Hero, she won’t listen to my commands no matter what. She even unlocked her seal by herself. What exactly is going on here, Granbell?”

Hero? You are saying that this girl is a Hero?

I was getting more and more confused.

Why would a demon lord keep a sealed Hero?

Although, it appeared that Luminas treasured her a lot, so maybe it wasn’t as simple as it seemed.

Luminas answered the question for Yuuki. “You don’t say! That thing is known as a ‘Hero,’ but is not actually the Hero. Right now, this girl in front of us is the incarnation of evil named Chronoa—”

She sounded furious, yet surprisingly, it was mixed with a touch of anxiety.

Luminas said that the girl was called Chronoa, and that she was the incarnation of evil. Hearing these foreboding words from her, she had to be very dangerous.

“Kukuku, thank you for all your efforts, Yuuki,” laughed Granbell. “For that Holy Ark—not even I could crack the seal of holy particles. That’s why I manipulated you. Once the seal is undone, none of us can stand against her. You demon lords and evil men! All of you will die here!” he finished with a roar. What a nice guy though. He spilled the beans about his entire plan; in a way, he did us a great favor.

—Even so, the current predicament didn’t improve.

I could hear Yuuki complaining.

“Seriously, in this a game of betrayal, I lost? I totally got played…”

However, this stalemate was about to come to an end.

A certain object started trembling. The black-haired girl—Chronoa—was moving.

She shook her head slightly and opened her eyes—

And thus began one chaotic battle.

Did Luminas know about something else? I’ll have to ask her about this later. Right now, the goal is to survive.

“Diablo, take my place and handle things here.”

“—Understood!”

Diablo looked like he was about to say something else, but he read my expression and promptly agreed.

He was probably going to volunteer himself to fight. I didn’t have to argue with him over this. Diablo must have seen that I had no intention of changing my order to him.

Next—

The immediate question was how to act.

Luminas and Granbell were locked in a fierce stalemate.

Shion and Ranga were battling Razul.

Yuuki and his men were attempting to flee. While I didn’t want them to escape, they were barely a threat compared to Chronoa. With that being said, my grievances also made it difficult to simply ignore them. They would surely plot something behind our backs. There was no way that they would fight alongside us.

Leon had been looking rather soulless for some time now. Honestly, I had a feeling that he was going to be unreliable.

There were too few allies and far too many enemies.

This was a difficult situation. The odds weren’t in our favor.

Then, Chronoa opened her eyes.

She looked ready to fight.

While Chronoa was naked, she had on a single accessory: the bracelet on her wrist. That bracelet began to glow as black particles slowly covered Chronoa’s body. It was an exact copy of ‘Holy Spirit Armament.’ She was now protected by jet black armor, which was even stronger than Hinata’s light-based Holy Spirit Armament.

In addition to her armor, Chronoa also summoned a sword. It was a beautiful rapier akin to the Moonlight Rapier, with the only difference being that the blade was black.

«Warning. Despite having an identical shape, the energy stored within it is incredibly high.»

It looked like both her armor and weapon overshadowed legendary-grade. It was probably equal to my straight sword, or perhaps even stronger. In other words, it was possibly mythical-grade 11 .

I better abandon any naive expectations now.

This was no longer a question about whether my enemy was intelligent or not. My Skills alone might already be outmatched by her. I had a hunch that her weapon could break through my defense. If that premonition were accurate, I would be in grave danger.

«Warning. Enemy ‘Chronoa’ will—»

I know!

I didn’t need Raphael-san to tell me that I was in deep shit.

Following my instincts, I activated ‘Absolute Defense’ and dodged. Immediately after, black lightning blazed through the spot where I had been standing. It traveled in a straight horizontal line, vaporizing any obstacle in its way. The flash of light easily pierced through the walls of the Grand Cathedral and disappeared.

This was worse than ‘deep shit.’ Had I been one step slower, I would have taken a direct hit.

I guess whether I can hold on or not will depend on my luck.

«Negative. Even with ‘Absolute Defense’ of ‘Covenant King Uriel,’ ‘Spirit Particles’ can still break through. Only solution is to predict her movements and utilize ‘Spirit Particles’ to interfere with and cancel each other out. However, the enemy’s attack variability is greater than expected. It is difficult to predict, therefore—»

Impossible to defend against, right? I get it.

Then why was ‘Absolute Defense’ called “Absolute”… But my complaints could wait.

Evading her attack was already quite a feat. I deserved a bit of praise for that at least. Moreover, Chronoa wasn’t just targeting me alone. She turned her attention to Yuuki when she struck next.

Chronoa scored a slice on his cheek, as Yuuki failed to evade the attack.

You deserve that one—while it was sort of inappropriate to gloat now of all times, do indulge me to take a jab.

Speaking of, Chronoa’s attack was really something else.

Against a purely physical attack, Yuuki’s ‘Anti-Skill’ was pointless.

Now that I thought about it, I actually enjoyed how convenient Skills like ‘Physical Attack Nullification’ were, while Yuuki did not. Even if he could fortify his body, at the end of the day, he was still human.

And here I thought that ‘Anti-Skill’ was quite a threat, but as it turns out, it had a surprising number of flaws.

I could only produce these observations by watching other people fight.

I needed to come up with a solution before she turned her attention back to me.

«Proposal. Do you wish to activate the Skill ‘Storm Dragon Summon’ of the Ultimate Skill ‘Storm King Veldora’? YES/NO»

Ah, I forgot I had this in my deck!

I didn’t want to use this ace in the hole in front of so many people, but if I didn’t do anything, the situation would undeniably become dire. And that’d be an even bigger problem.

It would be too late if someone else was killed like Hinata.

I felt a bit uneasy considering the relationship between Luminas and Veldora. But I could deal with that later.

I happily accepted Raphael-san’s proposal.

I had secretly practiced this by myself in order to master the key points. However, when I called for Veldora through ‘Soul Corridor,’ I only got a lazy response.

‹Hmm, Rimuru? Are you having fun after ditching me for your little hiking tour?›

He was throwing a tantrum.

This isn’t a hiking tour.

I really needed him to stop complaining for a second. I didn’t even have time to make a clever retort.

Now was the time to speak from the heart.

‹Veldora, I’m begging you here, we need your help. Please come and help us!›

Emotions transmitted through ‘Soul Corridor’ was a lot more straightforward than in ‘Telepathy Net.’ As a result, I would get caught lying very easily, hence I didn’t use the former that often. On the other hand, if I wanted to convey genuine words, it was perhaps the best means of communication.

Veldora seemed rather surprised.

‹Oh oh, do you need my power? Of course you do, there aren’t that many people as reliable as me after all. I can totally understand why you’d want to rely on me!›

Dammit, did I boost his ego a bit too much?

No, it’s fine. Surely Veldora will answer my request.

‹There’s no time; can I summon you?›

‹Hmph, what kind of a silly question is that? You have a favor to ask from me, and if that’s the case, there’s only one answer! Whatever your request is, I will fulfill it to the best of my abilities!›

Just as I thought, Veldora was quite reliable.

«Approval granted. Activating Skill ‘Storm Dragon Summon.’»

Soon after, a gust of wind began blowing within the Grand Cathedral—

This whole time, Leon had been numb.

Did I not make it in time…?

The girl named Chloe…there was no other explanation—she was the playmate that Leon had been searching for. In his pursuit, he had dirtied his hands, using countless forbidden methods for hundreds of years. And she was standing in front of him.

Indeed, she was right there. Yet, a moment later, she vanished.

At first, Leon suspected it was Rimuru’s doing. However, he quickly rejected the thought. Leon could only accept that something beyond his comprehension had occurred.

It’s still too early to give up just yet, Leon told himself. I’ve seen her now. I will get another chance!

By the time he pulled himself together again, he realized that the situation surrounding him had taken a steep dive for the worse.

A new enemy, with seemingly invincible power, had appeared.

Even though he had no idea about her strength, the fact that he could see Rimuru on the defensive put Leon on the spot as well. There was no telling whether he would be the next target or not.

Watching Yuuki being attacked and dodging left and right for his life reminded Leon that he was still on the battlefield.

It was a bit late of a realization.

All the people who had been incapacitated laid by the walls of the Grand Cathedral. Unbeknownst to Leon, Rimuru had purposefully moved them there to keep them out of the battle.

These people were still alive, just knocked out. That was why Leon lowered his guard against them.

Normally, Leon would not have made such a mistake, but his head was a mess. Seeing the girl he’d been looking for disappear before his eyes shocked him.

With all these factors combined, Leon was full of openings. And that was why he could not react in time.

Suddenly, a small magic missile shot from the wall side. It didn’t really pack a punch. Besides, it was meant for Chronoa, who was chasing Yuuki. Something like that obviously could not harm Chronoa, but the attacker’s actual purpose had been achieved.

Chronoa turned her attention to Leon, her stare boring into him.

Leon clicked his tongue. “Tsk, so it was meant to draw her onto me!”

He had to ignore the perpetrator as he couldn’t take his eyes off Chronoa for one second; otherwise, it’d cost him his life. If he didn’t fight seriously, even Demon Lord Leon would be in a tough spot. Yet, even if he did, he probably was not going to win against her.

That was how tough of an opponent Chronoa presented.

At this point, Leon could no longer care about anything else.

In the background, people began to cheer at this turn of events.

It was Yuuki and his entourage.

“Nice job, Teare!”

“What a nice call. I never expected Teare to be of use under these circumstances. But having this fail-safe sure was the right choice.”

Teare’s job was to potentially make Rimuru antagonize Leon. Sadly, no opportunity ever emerged, so Teare had to play along this whole time.

Her endurance and the perfect timing had been rewarded.

“Hehehe, now we just have to wait for Teare to return and we can retreat.”

Yuuki was sweating hard when Chronoa targeted him, but now, he had regained his composure. He even had the spare time to observe Leon and Chronoa’s battle. Because of this, he discovered Teare stumbling by the wall, trying her hardest to escape. He managed to rescue her in time for Laplace to finish his preparations for their escape.

Just as Yuuki brought Teare back, Laplace cast his magic.

“All done, let’s hurry back now.”

“Agreed. Rimuru-san seems to be planning something; it’d be dangerous to stay here. Let’s get out of here, shall we?”

Nodding in agreement, Yuuki raised his hands to the sky. He subsequently destroyed the entire magic barrier over the nation of Lubelius.

“Hehehe, as expected from the boss man.”

“No matter how you see it, Boss’s Skill totally feels like cheating…”

“But ain’t that just great? Thanks to that, we can easily get away.”

Just as Laplace said, it was impossible to escape from the city center with his magic alone. Fortunately, Yuuki’s power managed to change things in their favor.

Teare was right too; it really was like cheating. But thanks to that unfairness, everyone managed to escape, and so there were no complaints.

“I’m not sure who will manage to survive, but the next time we meet, we will be enemies. Give it your best shot!”

With these parting words, Yuuki and his companions departed.

I saw Yuuki and his men run away.

Although I was angered by it, with them having left behind these difficult opponents and being able to flee scot-free—perhaps it was a good thing when considered from a different perspective.

It was impossible to tell whether he was an enemy or a friend—or in this case, a definite enemy. Therefore, you never knew if you were going to be stabbed in the back while working together with someone like that.

It could get ugly quick with there being two fronts. Rather than that, it was better to lock onto one single enemy. I’d have a better chance of winning.

In the Western Nations, the Western Holy Church’s influence was massive.

As long as Luminas supported my claims, Yuuki would lose all shred of credibility in the West. After all, the backbone of the Freedom Association was the council, yet this supposed leader of the Association was fighting against Luminas.

If we were to win here, Yuuki would no longer pose a threat. Thus, I needn’t be so upset about his escape. I strengthened my resolve with these words, and fixed my eyes firmly on my enemy.

“Rimuru, isn’t this…the Hero that sealed me?”

“It appears so.”

“It’s definitely her,” Veldora smugly declared. “Even when she’s not wearing the mask, the shape of her mouth is just how I remembered when I got a peek. I was right! She is beautiful!”

Even though this was hardly the time, how could he, a ‘True Dragon,’ judge human appearances? I was a bit curious.

In any case, my suspicion that Veldora “Only lost because he fell in love” was deepened.

“I agree that she’s stunning, but she’s our enemy now. Looks like she was sealed by Luminas before and just went berserk. It sounds like it was a countermeasure to you, so could you please take responsibility and do something about it?”

“How rude. Why would anyone need some dramatic countermeasure for someone as upstanding as me?”

Did you actually just say that out loud…

I was almost impressed, if not completely baffled.

But Veldora’s nonsense could wait.

“You can save your jokes for later. Please try to hold her back for a while and win me some time!”

“KUA-HAHAHA! Leave it to me! After all, fate has brought me the opportunity to fight her again. Would it be okay if I beat her?”

Oh oh, so cool!

But hold on, isn’t that what the losing side usually says?

“Fine by me! I’ll be counting on you!”

“Just leave it to me. I lost to her when I was just a dragon, so this is a great chance to show off my strength after my growth.”

In spite of how confident he sounded, hadn’t he actually become weaker?

What kind of logic is that you become stronger in your human form than when you are a dragon? Despite internally disparaging him, seeing how motivated he looked, I decided it was better not to tell him. And so I very gladly shoved Veldora onto the battlefield.

Even if he lost, Veldora wouldn’t die anyway. I could rest assured about that.

I turned my head to Leon. “Are you all right, Leon?”

Chronoa was observing us, so my eyes didn’t dare stray from her as I spoke to Leon.

“I managed to hold it together, but don’t get careless. She is stronger than I imagined.”

In any case, I healed Leon’s injuries first. His sword had been broken and he himself was covered in wounds. It was a miracle that he made it this far.

It was thanks to the time bought by Leon that I managed to summon Veldora successfully.

“I could tell that from the moment I saw her. Moreover, since Luminas had been on high alert against her, I knew from the start that she wouldn’t be an easy opponent.”

That was the reason why I even used my trump card, Veldora.

“Is this why you called Veldora? I’m not going to ask you how you did it, but it’s definitely encouraging knowing he’s on our side. However, even a ‘True Dragon’ would have a hard time fighting that thing.”

I didn’t need him to tell me twice.

Because this Chronoa was the one who sealed Veldora away.

“By the way, how are your wounds?”

“Nothing severe. I wasted too much mana trying to prevent my sword from shattering, and thankfully, nothing fatal hit me.”

Coincidentally, Leon’s sword had broken in the end, regardless. In addition, despite how nonchalant Leon put his words, he seemed to be biting his lip, trying to hold himself up.

We didn’t have the extra hands to protect Leon. With how things developed, perhaps I made the right choice in the end.

I didn’t just summon Veldora. There was one more person I called.

“Are you all right, Leon-sama? Long time no see.”

It was Charys.

I ran into a bit of an issue during the summoning. Veldora decided to be stubborn and wanted to bring Charys along, no matter what.

“You are…Ifrit?”

“Indeed. I have now been given the name Charys and am in the service of Veldora-sama.”

“I see, I am glad that you are doing well.”

“I never realized Leon-sama’s true intention was for Shizue Izawa and I to understand each other. It was under the guidance of Veldora-sama that I have now realized how foolish I was.”

“…Is that so?” Leon nodded.

But I honestly doubted whether the two really knew each other. It sounded like they were just casually greeting each other, though it’d be improper to tease them about it given the current situation. They were both so serious. I guess the master and servant were very alike one another.

“Rimuru, please buy me some time. It’s time for you to witness some of my trump cards,” Leon said.

He could be planning to escape by using me as a distraction, but I believed that Leon wasn’t that kind of person.

I trusted him.

“Understood. I’ll be covering Veldora then. Charys, you shall stand guard here as Leon finishes his preparations.”

“Understood!”

“My apologies, thanks for the assistance.”

And that was settled.

Leon quickly began getting ready. Charys would be in charge of protecting him. The master and servant from the past were working together once again.

I, on the other hand, returned to the battlefield.

The final battle was about to start.