

CHAPTER 6

GODS AND DEMON LORDS

In the land of eternal night, within a burial chamber unknown to the world, encased in a casket of ice, there was a beautiful, dark-haired, naked girl. A figure was in front of her, also nude, as she embraced the casket with an eerie smile on her spellbound face. Her skin, as pale as the white-hot sun, burned a shade of red as she let out a satisfied sigh.

Ah… So beautiful… Ah…

Beholding this girl in the coffin, and showering her with love, was the secret delight of this charming silver-haired figure, her red-and-blue eyes flickering as they let out their ominous glow. They brought out her traditional beauty, enhancing it to another level. But what struck any observer of her the most were the two prominent white canines jutting out from both sides of her lips. Whenever she opened those lips, her bloodred tongue and milky-white fangs would bare themselves.

This was the demon lord Luminus Valentine, Queen of Nightmares and ruler of the night.

Whenever she touched this casket, it left a burn-like mark on her beautiful skin. It was an ark, a pure block of holy force, and thus damaging to Luminus. As a vampiric demon lord, this whole casket was like poison to her. But she didn’t let it bother her. Even the bruising was bliss itself.

Even a demon lord with Luminus’s powers was incapable of breaking the casket. So instead she lovingly caressed it, hoping for the day when she’d finally be able to release the girl sleeping inside…

One of her trusted associates made contact with her.

“I apologize for interrupting your fun, but there is something I wish to inform you of.”

It was Louis, the one she had enlisted to be Holy Emperor of Lubelius. The sound of his voice annoyed her, but she put up with it. It was rare for him to speak up like this, and she could easily imagine it being an emergency.

“Oh. Louis? Did something happen?”

“Hinata has moved to defeat Rimuru, the root of all this evil. I tacitly allowed her to do so, but things have apparently grown complicated.”

“…How do you mean?”

Louis gave her the truth, as revealed by his own investigations.

“Ah… No time to relax, then.”

With a weary sigh, Luminus removed herself from the casket, left the burial chamber, and called for a servant.

“Gunther!”

“Yes, my lady?”

Gunther was an elderly vampire in Luminus’s service, a butler who had joined her at Walpurgis. Now he emerged from the darkness, one of the Three Servants under her control and almost on her level of power. Louis was her point man on the emperor’s throne, Gunther within the city of Nightgarden, and the late Roy her stand-in demon lord as a deterrent against outside propaganda. All three were also Luminus’s bodyguards; Luminus was currently in a burial chamber situated deep inside Nightgarden, and Gunther was keeping watch over her nearby.

With a measured hand, Gunther assisted Luminus with her clothing. The fact that she preferred the ceremony of manually putting on her outfit over some instant magical transformation was a telling indicator of her form-over-function tastes.

“Honestly,” Gunther griped at Louis as he helped her change, “bothering her with such trivial nonsense…”

“My apologies,” Louis replied. “But if we leave things be for much longer, we run the risk of losing your beloved Hinata as well, I fear.”

“Such silly concerns! Although, if it is the demon lord Rimuru she crosses swords with, prudence would certainly be in order…”

“I come to you both now because I don’t want them to cross swords. If Hinata is killed, what would Luminus…?”

“Louis,” Luminus grudgingly interrupted, “that’s enough from you. You too, Gunther. A single appearance from me is all this needs, no? Then we can eliminate the source.”

The Three Servants hated it when one of them horned in on the territory of another, which was a source of frustration for Luminus. Louis knew that, which was why he deferred to Gunther this time.

“Yes, my lady.”

“I apologize…”

The two of them bowed their heads meekly. Luminus gave them a snort.

“With Roy gone, I’ll need to rejuggle your assignments. Right now, though, I don’t have the time for it. Both of you, follow me.”

She began to walk, in all her solemn majesty. The two magic-born were ready to follow her.

“Yes, my lady.”

“Allow me, my lady.”

Then Luminus stopped for a moment, turning back toward the casket her beloved slept within.

Wait for me, all right…?

She then whispered the name of the precious girl inside, before grimly caressing the chamber’s door and closing it behind her.

Soundlessly, shut away by Luminus’s massive magic barrier, the chamber slipped down into true darkness.

Damrada the Gold, one of the leaders of the Cerberus secret society, had finally made it back to Farmus from his clandestine meeting with the Five Elders. He was now in Migam, out in the countryside, and given how well he knew the money-hungry Earl Nidol of Migam, he hadn’t forgotten to placate him with enough presents to earn his trust.

This time, as well, a little bribe was all he needed to allow a protégé of his to reside within Migam. Edmaris, too, was there now in an undisclosed location, and Damrada knew this domain would become the eye of the storm before long. Edward, the new king, had dragged a force of twenty thousand toward this domain’s borders—Damrada knew that, too.

His spreading the word that the hero Yohm was keeping the old king, Edmaris, safe was enough to convince Edward that the two were conspiring against him. That armistice, after all, was unilaterally signed by Edmaris. There was no need, Edward had made it very clear, for the new administration to honor it. And as Edward told his people, he had attempted to reason sincerely with them, only to have Edmaris and Yohm raid their royal coffers and steal away their money.

To Farmus’s urban dwellers, far removed from the borderlands, a hero incapable of anything except combat wasn’t that worthy of their appreciation. Being so safe in their cities, after all, made them underestimate the need for such stout defense. Some even questioned the need to keep people like Yohm and his force fed on the public dime. It was funny to see how such a large swath of people failed to realize that safety came at a price.

In the midst of this, the announcement that the hero Yohm and the old king, Edmaris, had embezzled the reparation funds infuriated Farmus’s upper class. More and more of them volunteered their support for Edward; nobody doubted his moral superiority on this question. And with that support egging him on, Edward had deployed his troops.

If current trends continue, it wouldn’t be long before Yohm and Edmaris were arrested on trumped-up charges and executed. They wouldn’t be willing to accept that, of course, which meant war was on the horizon—just as Damrada drew it up.

Yohm had only about five thousand troops here in Migam, but they had been taking in reinforcements for the past three days.

Hmm… So Rimuru hasn’t abandoned Yohm after all. How terribly naive of him. Now Hinata the Enlightened has a better chance of victory than ever before. Perhaps now is the time to move…

This, too, was within Damrada’s realm of imagination. On a wholly personal level, he would love it if Hinata could be taken out of the picture for good. It was likely that she knew she had been taken advantage of by her lies, so it was best to eliminate her before she got in the way. Damrada doubted she’d ever forgive him for it, and he needed to keep that in mind during his operations in the Western Nations.

For now, though, he would have to leave Hinata in the hands of the Five Elders. Any more direct intervention with her would be too dangerous.

Ah well. Not like this mission will end in failure…

The leader of Cerberus ordered him to trigger a war in this region. Nothing else. As far as Damrada was concerned, his job was already done, so it’d be a smarter bet to pull out before Hinata got back. But there was just a bit of unfinished business left. Damrada didn’t care who won between the hero and the new king, but if he wanted to secure future profits, he had a promise with the Five Elders to fulfill. The demon had to be killed.

This, however, was where his plans began to go awry. Earl Nidol Migam had tipped Damrada off on an internal meeting held in his domain, and judging by the report, this demon was aiming for a quick end to the battle as well.

What would this mean to him? It meant that the new king and the demon wanted two completely different things for Farmus. Edward had no intention of hostilities against Rimuru. The monster forces clearly outclassed his, and there was no way Farmus could beat Tempest alone. But despite that, Rimuru had still sent reinforcements to the hero Yohm. That indicated to Damrada that he wasn’t afraid of war, should it come to that. All that talk about a “just cause” was turned on its side the moment the demon lord sided with Edmaris. He had changed his mind, it seemed.

This gave Damrada some concern. In the midst of his investigations as he sought the demon, he had come to learn that the magic-born Razen was now serving the demon Damrada was trying to kill, not Edmaris. Which meant…

…Was it that demon who defeated Razen, not Rimuru himself? This is no Johnny-come-lately demon given physical form on this world, then. Perhaps an older demon has been revived…

The thought made him grimace. There wasn’t enough intelligence to work with; not even the Cerberus leader provided any information about the demon. This adversary, he reasoned, would have to be considered at least an early-modern Arch Demon, possibly older. The strength of this type of demon depended greatly on their age, and while “modern” ones were one thing, early-modern Arch Demons—two or three hundred years old—were a calamity-class threat. A “medieval” one, pushing nearly a millennium in age, could be powerful enough to serve as a demon lord’s aide. It was a completely different level of strength from some lower-level evolved demon. If an Arch Demon like that was on this world, it was devastating news, a threat to humankind as an ongoing concern.

It was worth noting that human beings had only successfully summoned demons up to the medieval level of age. That was as far as the records showed, and it made sense, because anything more powerful than that would mean the end of the summoners’ souls. They’d be immediately consumed. That was why the Eastern Empire’s latest research regularly called for limitations on demon summoning—although it took a hero-class summoner to make an Arch Demon do their bidding in the first place.

“The magic-born Razen, though…?” Damrada murmured.

Yes, Razen’s name was known far and wide across the Empire. Power like his was easily the match for a medieval-aged demon. If there was a demon out there who could defeat the likes of him…

Plus, the Five Elders seemed to be fairly blatantly scheming with one another. That piqued his curiosity a bit as well, but his instincts told him this was one wasp’s nest he was better off not prodding. Best to make good my escape, he thought, before I am caught up in anything else.

“Is something the matter, Sir Damrada?” his servant said, responding to the words he spoke to himself.

Damrada weakly smiled back. “Heh-heh-heh… This is too hot to touch. No more of this. We have word to lie low for now, and I’d consider it wise to heed that advice.”

“Pardon…?”

“We are retreating. Leave two or so observers behind and order everyone else to leave this nation.”

“Yes sir. What about you, Sir Damrada?”

“I will extend my formal greetings to King Edward, then pay a visit to Tempest.”

“But I thought you were advised to lie low…?”

“Hmm? Heh-heh-heh… Oh, I will. For now, I will cease my behind-the-scenes maneuvering, in favor of other advances. There’s no law against a proper merchant requesting an audience with the demon lord Rimuru, after all, in order to improve his business.”

“I see. Very well. And what should we do with the six Contractors we brought over from our homeland?”

“We’ll bring them to the new king. They will be a fine souvenir for him.”

“So it’ll all be pushed on King Edward’s shoulders, then?”

“If you want to put it that rudely, yes. It’d be a favor to Edward, all while I fulfill my promise to the Five Elders.”

These Contractors were an Eastern Empire organization that served roughly the same purpose as the Western Nations’ Free Guild. They were a group that assigned work to specialist professions, including demon hunters who worked full-time pursuing the demons of the realm. Only the best, most experienced monster fighters would be granted a license for this profession, and Damrada had paid a princely sum to bring six of these demon hunters with him. He had hoped to use them as advertising for Contractors at large, but now he sensed that things were too dangerous even for them.

“But do we really need to be on our guard this much? We haven’t fully made back our investment yet…”

“We’ll see, we’ll see. I may be overthinking it, but I like to trust in my instincts. I’m also not enough of a fool to lose my life when I should’ve been cutting my losses.”

“Ah. Yes, my apologies for doubting you. In that case, I will begin preparing for our retreat.”

“Good. And I will prepare another present for the new king.”

The servant left the room. Preparations went quickly after that, and before much longer, Damrada had put Migam behind him. He was right to do so, for if he had dawdled any further, he might have had an angered demon trying to kill him.

Edward, newly crowned king of Farmus, was beside himself with excitement.

The nobility across the land was falling over themselves to pledge their support to him, expanding and strengthening his forces. It surprised him to see the hero Yohm side with Edmaris, his elder brother, and when Rimuru sided in turn with Yohm, he feared his entire plan would fail. But the heavens hadn’t abandoned him.

With Archbishop Reyhiem dead, the wheels had begun turning. Hinata herself was off to slay Rimuru, he had been informed, with the Crusader forces in tow. Even better, the heroes of the Holy Empire of Lubelius—the Three Battlesages, the royal officers second only to Hinata in strength—had offered their support to Edward’s cause, deploying the Temple Knights for the effort. The divine-enemy label hadn’t been formally announced yet, but given this deployment, it had to be a matter of time.

The Temple Knights were assigned the task of defeating the demon who killed Reyhiem, but that was just a convenient excuse. In Edward’s mind, they were actually aiming to mount a resistance against the demon lord Rimuru, armed with an enormous force that was essentially the federated armies of the Western Nations. That was why he granted them safe passage through his lands, as well as the right to engage in any military activity they saw fit.

He had no intention of tangling with Rimuru, but under the circumstances, that didn’t matter. There was no way Hinata would lose to the demon lord, and with this large a force, he reasoned, defeating the Tempest forces wasn’t an impossibility at all. Veldora remained a concern…but with a dragon that finicky, the combined forces of the Western Nations ought to be able to seal him up once again.

Now he needed a just cause to link all these efforts together, and that was already taken care of. A powerful merchant from the East had visited him, bringing a letter from Earl Nidol of Migam. It was a request for help, and it instantly solved all Edward’s problems. It didn’t take long for him to reach a conclusion.

With reinforcements flowing through the border from all sides, it might be best to use Migam’s rescue as an excuse to deploy my own.

A full-on war wasn’t in his plans, but deploying his force outside the city walls should prove enough of a deterrent. There was nobody around Edward to warn him otherwise—which he would come to regret later—as he sent out the order.

In Glenda’s eyes, the plan had gone seriously out of whack, but that sort of thing was a given on the battlefield. She just had to adjust her tactics, make things work more her way, and she’d be fine. Looking at it that way, things didn’t seem so bad to her. A large number of nations were taking an interest in their moves, and a virtual army of journalists were here to see her in action.

Everything was set up just as she wanted it. Rimuru not focusing exclusively on Hinata was an unwanted surprise, but as Glenda saw it, it just meant he spread out his forces too wide for his own good. It wasn’t a problem.

Damrada had fled the country, but he had left a team of anti-demon experts with King Edward as a symbol of goodwill, each one battle-steeled and ranking an A or better. She figured they could be trusted to do their job.

No reason not to sacrifice them, if we need to, Glenda idly thought. No matter how it turned out, she optimistically believed that the demon would be out of her hair. That breezy mood didn’t last for long.

Heh-heh-heh-heh-heh…

Diablo, the demon in question, let out an evil laugh as he spread his batlike wings, looking like a sign of the apocalypse as he surveyed the land below. He was searching for the traitors who outed him, causing shame and embarrassment in front of his beloved Rimuru, and he wasn’t in a forgiving mood.

Not once in his life had he ever felt anything resembling fear. But the mere thought of being relieved of his work duties made him quiver. Picturing Rimuru staring at him and saying “All right, you can go away now” sent shivers up his spine. The terror tore him apart.

Now Diablo had to pay back the people responsible for that feeling. He contemplated what he’d do once he tracked them down. It made the smile even broader.

Then he found Edward, the new king, at the rear of the forces. With him were several others who stood out of the crowd strength-wise, at least somewhat—enough so that they could at least go toe to toe with Diablo. Part of the Ten Great Saints, perhaps?

Rimuru instructed him not to kill anyone who wasn’t involved. If they were involved, that didn’t apply—at least that was how Diablo and Hakuro, his overseer, had interpreted the missive. Any troops not defending themselves would be let go, of course, but if they attempted to fight him, that was another matter—especially if they decided to initiate hostilities themselves. Then, there was no need for mercy.

Resisting the urge to greet this new king at once, Diablo sent a Thought Communication, reporting his findings to Hakuro.

(Sir Hakuro, I have found one standout among them headed your way. He should keep Sir Ranga occupied, I would imagine.)

(Hmm. Roger that. Is it better not to kill him?)

(Yes. I believe he is related to Lubelius, the origin of those rumors against me. Capturing him alive would make him a useful pawn in our negotiations.)

(Very well. I will inform Sir Ranga.)

(Also… This target is leading approximately five thousand troops. By the Free Guild’s ranking, this includes several fighters graded at least an A.)

(Hmm. Perfect, then. Let’s point Gobta and Gabil at them.)

(Yes, a fine idea. I am sure this is a battle they cannot lose, but…)

(No need to worry. I will be watching them, so feel free to do whatever you like.)

(It relieves me to hear that from you. Excuse me, then.)

(Don’t overexert yourself.)

With his report given, there was now no need for restraint. He flew down toward his prey.

The sight of Diablo swooping in from out of nowhere froze the blood in Edward’s veins. Saare, enjoying a cup of tea with him, was barely able to react at all.

“Hello there. I believe we have met before, King Edward? My name is Diablo.”

He gave them an elegant bow. Before he could even finish his greeting, Edward’s knight captain was barking out orders.

“Fan out! Take defensive positions! Protect King Edward!!”

The royal guard jumped into action, grabbing Edward and trundling him toward the rear. The guard instantly formed a line of defense to cover Edward and create a wall of humanity between the devil and the king. Diablo took his time to react, simply standing there while all these troops scurried around. As far as the demon was concerned, his target was in sight. The hard work was all done. There was no reason for undue haste.

In another instant, Diablo found himself surrounded by Saare and his forces, covering the large, opulent royal tent the demon had landed in front of. He looked at them all, enjoying the sight—but although nobody noticed it, his eyes were burning with rage.

Soon, a group of journalists was on the scene, curious to see what was going on. Diablo kept smiling.

“I will not harm any of you. Just stay over there for me, please.”

Then, with a snap of his fingers, the press corps was covered in a barrier—a bit of helpful consideration on Diablo’s part, to ensure against collateral damage. He also meant to suggest that exiting the barrier would be seen as hostility punishable by death, but the journalists (luckily for them) never even entertained that thought.

By the time the forces were all in position, Edward had regained some of his composure.

“Well, well! The agent of the demon lord Rimuru, then? May I ask what brings you here?”

The greeting may have lacked much in the way of royal majesty, but it certainly succeeded in sounding pompous.

“Heh-heh-heh-heh-heh… Oh, just a warning for you.”

“A warning? What kind?”

“Send your troops back immediately and hold talks with Sir Yohm. Then you will not have to taste the kind of fear you are better off not knowing about.”

For appearances, at least, he began by recommending talks. That, however, was not what Diablo really sought. If anything, it’d be a pain for Diablo if Edward actually agreed to them.

“Ha-ha-ha! What a strange proposal this is. Besides, all of this began when my brother embezzled the reparation money from our accounts. We are simply trying to recover these funds, in a gesture of sincerity toward your nation. I see no need for you to meddle in our affairs!”

“I see. So you’re stating your intention to adhere to our peace accords?”

“Of course… Although I now see there was no need to. I was almost tricked myself!”

“Meaning…?”

“Hmph! Enough playing dumb! You are conspiring with my brother Edmaris to charge us for double the reparations, are you not? Don’t think I haven’t seen through your little schemes!”

“……”

“Nothing to defend yourself with, is there? Whether he calls himself a demon lord or not, this Rimuru fellow has already demonstrated just how shallow he is to me. He seeks to plunder us, by fair means or foul, and he’s spreading the seeds of war across the land, is he not?”

“…………”

“But what a pity, isn’t it? You may have killed Archbishop Reyhiem in a bid to keep him quiet, but his words are recorded right here!”

Edward took Diablo’s silence as an invitation to chatter on and on. The crystal ball he took out was held high above his head, ensuring the press on hand could see it. It depicted a very haggard-looking Reyhiem, perhaps after a torture session or two. “I had no intention of betraying you!” he shouted. “Please, please forgive me!” One could tell any viewer that this was footage of Reyhiem’s final moments in this world, and they’d believe it.

“And what does this piece of evidence prove?” Diablo asked.

Edward laughed back, clearly considering it a foolish question. “Don’t you see? Lady Glenda over there brought this to us. You infiltrated Lubelius and killed Sir Reyhiem, did you not? Perhaps you thought mere threats would cow him into doing your bidding, but his faith outclassed your terror! So you feared him telling the world about your crimes, and it led you to do this!”

He looked down at Diablo, all but daring him to respond. Diablo’s smile remained intact.

“How impressive. A mere human being able to overcome his fear of me? That’s a rather funny joke.”

“Don’t dodge the question! You’ve seen the evidence against you; you cannot merely talk your way out of it—”

“Enough. Silence.”

Diablo’s quiet voice cut off the new king as he was trying to show his full dignity to the press. For a single moment, his smile disappeared. Replacing it was a hideous, barren, unfathomable terror.

“This charade is over. I cannot enjoy a battle of wits if you neglect to bring any with you to the contest.”

The words were enough to freeze Edward where he stood.

“I had thought about explaining the truth in detail to prove my innocence, but I see that would be a waste of time. Humans are wired, after all, to believe only what they want to believe. But there is an easier way to prove my case…”

“Wh-what are you saying…?”

The change in Diablo’s attitude intimidated Edward. Only now did he realize that this approach of his might not have been the most intelligent idea.

“You would like me to prove my innocence,” Diablo continued, “wouldn’t you? If anybody here is able to overcome their fear of me, I will gladly admit defeat. But let me caution you: I have never been defeated before. If you seek to defy me, then be prepared to face the consequences.”

His voice was just as calm as always. But within those golden eyes of his, a pair of crimson pupils burned with rage. If this were only for himself, Diablo could’ve still held himself in check, but Edward had decided to cruelly slander Rimuru as well. And at that moment, Edward’s luck ran out.

“K-kill him!” the fear-stricken Edward shouted. “Engage this demon menace at once!”

The demon hunters mixed in with the soldiers guarding the king were waiting for this order. They all simultaneously leaped out and attacked Diablo.



“Overcome our fear of you? Too easy! You might think yourself invincible as an Arch Demon, but we stumble across demons like you in our homeland all the time!”

“No demon can survive for long if you pulverize their physical form! That applies just as much to an Arch Demon!”

“We’ve done our homework on how to handle demons like you. Don’t count us humans out!”

The hunters worked in tandem as they shouted at him, going into a lethal formation. They had a laser focus on Diablo, despite what their bold insults would imply. Diablo, after all, had a name, and a named Arch Demon was a level above the norm threat-wise.

“What? No response, then?”

“All bark and no bite, eh?”

Swinging Special compound-alloy chains imbued with the holy element, they pinned Diablo down, binding his arms and legs. Their very first move had succeeded, and it made them let up on their caution just a bit.

The Eastern Empire, for better or for worse, had more experience with marauding demons than the Western Nations. This was supposedly because of a demon stronghold in the East that held sway over a gigantic amount of power, but either way, it also meant that demon hunters really were well-trained fighters in the art of anti-demon tactics. An Arch Demon was strictly the stuff of legend in the West, but eastward, they had conducted extensive research on demons, dividing them into categories and coming up with strategies for each type.

The leader of the demon hunters had pegged Diablo as a medieval-age demon, but considering his named status, it seemed sounder to treat him as an “ancient” one instead. A member of the demon nobility, gifted with massive power, intelligence, and perhaps even a vast army of kin. The threat could not be underestimated.

But the leader still believed in their chances at victory. He had experienced several Arch Demon fights himself, and he never doubted the decision-making skills he learned from those battles.

“Are you ready, then?”

That was why Diablo’s question seemed so befuddling to him.

“Wh-what?”

“I mean, if you have made your preparations, I would appreciate a starting signal.”

The leader failed to understand what the serene demon meant. “…Huh?” He hid his concern, trying to sound as defiant as possible. “Are you saying you won’t get in our way, no matter what we do?”

“Why would I? With all the effort you are clearly putting in, I don’t want to interfere, you see. This will just make the fear that much more vivid.”

“Heh…heh-heh… Don’t toy with us, demon. Your arrogance will be your end!”

Diablo’s joking around sent a slight chill across the demon hunters’ minds. Demons like him often looked down on people, overestimating their own skills. With that knowledge in mind, Diablo wasn’t venturing far from the typical demon script. This time, though, he was delivering these lines while already chained to the ground. Even a seasoned demon hunter would be put off by this much confidence.

Still, these were professionals. They didn’t delay a single beat, executing on the training routines they repeated day after day.

“…You shall regret your arrogance in hell! Vanquish him now! Thunderbolt!!”

As King Edward, journalists from nations worldwide, and Saare and the rest of the Lubelian royal guard looked on, Diablo was roasted by blinding flashes of electricity.

“How about that! What does natural, non-magicule-infused lightning taste like to you?!”

“A demon like you is protected by layers of barriers, we know. But too bad for you! With our Imperial technology, we can break right through your defenses!”

“Demons must be granted physical form to impose their will upon this world. With your body destroyed, there is nothing you can do!”

The demon hunters seemed to treat their victory as a given. Any magicule-driven force could be easily blocked by a barrier built for the purpose. In response, the Eastern Empire had researched weapons that didn’t rely on magic to work. This lightning trick was one of them, the latest in anti-demon tech, and hearing that made Edward’s terror ease a bit.

“Wonderful!” he shouted, relieved. “Truly, you are the heroes of the East! I must raise my reward for that merchant!”

His face was twisted in glee as he looked at Diablo. The lightning was roasting the demon alive… Or was it? The flashes of light had fully enveloped his body by now, but that smile was still on Diablo’s lips.

Only Saare and Glenda picked up on this at first. It worried them. The demon hunters’ leader, however, was puzzling over something else.

…This shouldn’t be happening. This shouldn’t be happening! Why isn’t there a single burn mark on his clothing?!

Then he saw it. That evil, evil smile.

“Y-you…!!”

“Heh-heh-heh-heh-heh. A rather meager effort. Too meager, in fact. You thought this would suffice against me? After all that hard work, I can’t help but call it a disappointment.”

Diablo casually brought an arm up. The moment he did, the chains binding him shattered.

“Whoa!”

“Nngh!!”

With unbelievable force, Diablo ripped the reinforced-alloy chains off his body.

“Y-you monster!!”

He laughed at the words of shock from the leader’s mouth. “Right, then,” Diablo said, as if nothing had just happened. “Now for the selection test.”

“W-wait! This is insanity! Why didn’t the lightning work on you?!”

Out of disbelief, or perhaps to divert his impending terror, the leader had to ask the question. Diablo was kind enough to provide a detailed reply.

“Why, you ask? It’s simple. I am equipped with a strong resistance to natural influences, electrical discharge included. Your attack just now was such a meager strike at me, it didn’t even merit building a defensive barrier to counter it. Is that satisfactory?”

The leader began to visibly shake. If anything, that was brave of him. The rest of the hunters, realizing the portent behind Diablo’s statement, had already fallen screaming to the ground.

“Aaaahhhhhhh!! Get away! Stop! Get away from me!!”

“Nnoooooooooo! H-help me!!”

These were first-class demon hunters, fearless, battle-trained warriors. And they weren’t alone. Except for the protected journalists, everybody witnessing this scene felt their spines freeze solid. Edward fainted right where he stood, foaming at the mouth, and so did his royal guard.

What just happened? The leader could see it well enough—this overwhelming terror, the sheer pressure this demon was sending their way. To put it as simply as possible, all Diablo did was unleash the full brunt of his aura—but that aura was daunting enough in itself to kill.

“Oh? So only three of you passed the test? Well, I suppose you do deserve praise for withstanding my Lord’s Ambition. You hereby have my permission to engage me.”

Hearing this, even as he felt the terror closing around his throat, the leader turned around. There, just as Diablo promised, were the two others left standing—Saare and Glenda, the young man and the wild beauty.

The sight of them seemingly unfazed helped the leader rally his exhausted mind. It’s all right. It’s still all right. The Battlesages didn’t let us down—truly the heroes of the West. My hunters may be done for, but with these two on hand, victory could yet be ours…

Encouraged, the leader turned back toward Diablo. “Heh… Heh-heh. Yes, you are every bit your demon lord’s servant. You’re just as good at bluffing as he no doubt is.”

“Bluffing, you say?”

“I do! You called that Lord’s Ambition just now, didn’t you? It takes a demon lord–class monster to wield that skill—and if Arch Demon is the highest level of the demon races, it is impossible for you to become a demon lord! That proves you are a liar!”

In the East, this fact was considered highly classified research. Demons, he knew, had an upper limit to the amount of magicules their bodies could store. This was a set number across all of them, even though they could differ in other forms of strength. Older demons would have more experience in battle, allowing them to form better strategies for conserving their magic and squeezing everything they could from it. This was also one reason not to fear demons as much as people often did, for if you knew your enemy’s magic limit, you could work with that, no matter how they tried to spin it. Knowledge is power, and having the right knowledge can keep an obvious bluff from clouding your mind.

“I see. That is both correct and incorrect. It is true that demons like myself are limited in our magicule count. However, it is possible to evolve to the next level, assuming the right conditions are met.”

“Huh?”

“I think the Red would be an example famous enough for you to be aware of?”

“The Red? What do you…?”

And then a certain demon flashed across the leader’s mind. One so famous, his entire existence was the exception that proved the rule.

“It would be simple enough to obtain the title of demon lord, you see. All it takes is for one of us to build our strength up to the maximum level, then live for at least two thousand years. One hardly needs to even work for it.”

Diablo made it sound easy, but in reality, it was fiendishly difficult. As a spiritual life-form, demons naturally enjoyed combat. Even if they were never summoned to the physical realm, battle was a constant part of life in the spiritual one. Losing a fight over there would dock magicules off your upper limit, which meant that some demons actually devolved over time. Reaching one’s maximum, then maintaining it for two millennia, basically meant evolving into an Arch Demon and building an unbeaten record that entire time—not even a single loss.

The demon hunters’ leader wasn’t aware of that per se, but even he had a hunch that Diablo was heavily downplaying the stakes involved. But the offhand reference to the Red was what attracted his attention—Diablo was speaking of that absolute ruler, the famous demon, as if they were casual buddies.

It couldn’t be. Out of all the things, it couldn’t be that…

Demon society worked in a strictly hierarchical relationship, according to a theory first advanced by Lord Gadora, the great sorcerer from the Eastern Empire. This hierarchy was punishingly strict in nature, applied equally both to the Primal Demons and the higher-level members of each demon type. A lower-level one referring to a higher-level one without some term of respect was as unthinkable as the end of the world.

“But perhaps the White would be more famous in the East, where you grew up? I observed her using Lord’s Ambition over there just the other day…”

The remark cleared the haze from the leader’s mind. He recalled the events of several years ago, just before Blanc, the fearsome Original White, took form in this world. They called the event the Bloody Shore, and if it had turned out the wrong way, it would’ve marked the birth of a second Guy Crimson, disrupting the balance of demon lords and dooming the planet to chaos. The Empire used its clout to bury the events of that day, ensuring the public didn’t know about them.

The leader turned pale. Now he knew. The demon that casually called them Red and White had to be at least as powerful as the one that caused the Bloody Shore.

That, that, that just can’t be…possible…! There… There’s just no way for us to win! It’s ridiculous. How could any of this happen?!

The leader screamed internally…and then, all too easily, something snapped. Demon hunters were professionals, not thrill seekers. They didn’t risk their necks over a job unless the money was right. If it involved protecting their own family, that was one thing, but nobody wanted to die in a faraway foreign country like this. And now that the leader understood how desperately outclassed he was, he abandoned all resistance as futile.

“Please, save me!” He let go of all shame and honor, pleading with Diablo. “At least spare my life… Help me, please…!”

Diablo rewarded the display with a gentle smile. “Oh, what’s wrong? You passed the test for me. Why don’t we have some fun? Don’t you want to find out whether I’m bluffing or not? You should see it for yourself.”

The leader was desperate. There was no more doubting Diablo. He realized fully now that this was a supreme danger to himself and the rest of the world. Bluffing? Don’t be ridiculous.

“P-please, forgive me! I only came here for the money. I swear I will never defy you again! I’ll never do anything to interfere with you. If you order me to slit the king’s throat while he’s still unconscious, I’ll do it for you right now! Please! Anything for my life!”

The pleading was taking on a pathetic tone. It turned out to be worth it.

“Hmm. In that case, you may leave. Go into the barrier the journalists are in, and take all the other people strewn around here with you.”

The leader immediately obeyed. Without hesitation, he shook his fellow hunters awake, ordering them to fetch the fallen knights for him. The king, he personally hefted over his shoulder before fleeing into the barrier. None of the journalists chided him for it. They were too busy watching over this bizarre turn of events, holding their breath in anticipation.

The area in front of the tent was much cleaner now, as Saare flashed a defiant smile at Diablo.

“Hmm… Impressive. I find it hard to believe you’re merely a calamity-level Arch Demon.”

“Oh? You weren’t fleeing me?”

“Fleeing? Such an amusing remark. My name is Saare. I directly serve the Holy Emperor of Lubelius as part of his Imperial Guard, a member of both the Three Battlesages and the Ten Great Saints who stand in opposition to this demon lord of yours. But who are you?”

“As I stated earlier, I am called Diablo. That is my name, as granted to me by the great and powerful lord Rimuru.”

“…And you still aren’t going to reveal yourself?”

Saare attempted to keep himself friendly and at ease, even as the humiliation was making him reach his boiling point inside. All Diablo’s talk about people failing to “overcome” his terror was a direct affront to him—but he kept his thoughts rational. He wasn’t the kind to let pointless anger cloud his self-control, but in his mind, Diablo was acting far too disdainful with him.

Those demon hunters from the East were a joke, bragging about how professional they were but forced to beg for their lives at the end of it. Saare had let them keep up their act, since Glenda had suggested using them as sacrificial pawns, but this performance was far below his expectations.

Internally, he sneered at the demon before him. I shouldn’t have expected more from private citizens. We are tasked with guarding the Holy Emperor and the god Luminus herself. We are far more prepared to battle than they would ever be!

Despite that, he kept himself on a higher alert than usual. Grigori wanted to fight as well, he recalled, but it looks like the prey chose me instead. In which case…time to make him regret his arrogance.

Diablo was an unknown name, not mentioned in any of the ancient texts he was familiar with. It meant this was no great demon, nothing to pose a threat to him. Red, White—all that pretention. What’s there to be so afraid of? If this was a still-unnamed Primal Demon, all bets are off, but…

He could tell his foe was no regular Arch Demon, but to Saare, this didn’t seem like much to be concerned about. It was the sort of confidence that only the truly ignorant could have. He just knew too little about demons.

In his eyes, if this one wasn’t going to reveal his true nature, he’d just have to rip the disguise off by force. Saare, after all, had enough power to fight a demon lord alone. Valentine may have escaped at the end of their battle, but he was a hair’s breadth away from slaying him. A mere Arch Demon wasn’t cause for alarm at all.

That explained why Diablo’s attitude irked Saare so badly…but Diablo’s next statement made the Battlesage doubt his ears.

“…Reveal myself? Ah yes. I have so little interest in strength, I forgot to mention it. Indeed, as you say, I am not an Arch Demon. In fact, I have completed my evolution to Demon Peer. Rather similar, I think you’ll see,” he casually added, “but do try to remember the difference.”

That much really didn’t matter to Diablo—not as much as his name did. It was a trivial matter to him, but a massive crisis to Saare.

He couldn’t believe it. He didn’t want to believe it. What did the

demon before him just say? A Demon Peer? That was…purely the stuff of legend, unofficially classified as a disaster-level threat, and its force far exceeded anything else in the demon family. Not even a higher-level spirit could hope to catch a whiff of that kind of power. It would take multiple elemental lord–class creatures to deal with it.

Only a few very old tomes had examples of one interfering with this world, but it proved that they did exist. Just look at the strongest demon lord that ever walked the earth…

Oh.

Now it made sense to Saare. A demon who had lived for millennia and become a demon lord–class presence, like Diablo mentioned, could evolve into a Demon Peer via some kind of trigger. Of course that evolution would boost his force to such dizzying levels. The Red’s magicule count had ballooned to several times that of a regular Arch Demon, and he had all those extra years of experience, too. Truly, there was no limit to his strength.

The demon hunters’ leader, warily eyeing these events, had fallen unconscious the moment he heard the words Demon Peer. He was overcome—not with fear, but with relief. If he had actually fought that demon… That was too much to even consider. And the joy he felt, avoiding that fate, literally knocked him unconscious.

Nobody could blame the guy. Even Saare was taken by an all-encompassing desire to run away. And the scariest part? Some fool out there was insane enough to give such a rare Arch Demon a name.

What in the name of Luminus could Rimuru have possibly been thinking?!

Saare could feel a cold sweat erupt from every pore in his body. His instincts were sounding the alarm bells, the easygoing attitude of a moment ago now barely a passing memory. He knew how impossible this was.

If Diablo had given his name without hesitation like that, it meant there really was someone out there who had granted it to him. A masterless named creature would never be so eager to share his name, since it would expose him to falling under the control of someone else. It proved that the demon lord Rimuru really was behind this.

But could Rimuru, freshly ordained as a demon lord, even have the energy needed to name an Arch Demon?

There wasn’t much point pondering that question, but Saare couldn’t help but wonder. His mind was just attempting to escape reality at this point.

Then he felt something in motion next to him.

“What are you balking for, Saare?! Let’s you and I take out that sexy-looking demon together!”

Glenda was virtually screaming at him.

“No! Glenda, wait!”

Saare was already too late to stop her. Like the wind, she strode forth, sneaking up to Diablo without a sound and thrusting her black-bladed knife at him. It plunged straight into Diablo’s undefended heart.

“Ha! No threat at all!!”

Glenda laughed. She could tell that hit home. But sadly, Diablo had no intention of dodging that from the start.

“Heh-heh-heh-heh-heh… That is some commendable physical ability. Unfortunately,” he flatly stated, “physical attacks do not work on me.”

That was the truth. Diablo had acquired a trait known as Cancel Melee Attack.

Glenda quickly leaped back a safe distance. “Pfft! What a pain!” Then, ignoring Saare’s warning, she launched a barrage of quick attacks. Even she could tell he was a formidable foe; she no longer openly berated him like before, and she was treating this like a battle against a full-bore demon lord.

But it was all mere sport to Diablo. He was in a realm of his own, power-wise, and nothing Glenda busted out could ever affect him.

Now Glenda realized this—or to be exact, she had sensed as much from the start. Her real goals lay elsewhere.

Saare, resigned to his fate, steeled himself. Unable to abandon Glenda, he joined the battle, unleashing his spiritual force and boosting his physical skills to the max. Wielding the Demonslayer, a Unique weapon obtained through massive amounts of capital, he slashed at Diablo. It didn’t work.

“Dammit! Slashes don’t work on him?! Glenda, buy me some time so I can unleash my holy magic…”

Reasoning that only his strongest magic would knock this menace out, Saare asked Glenda for a hand. Glenda had no response. Diablo spoke in her place.

“I believe your female companion just fled?”

Saare had trouble understanding this at first. Turning around, disbelieving his own ears, he couldn’t find Glenda there. Diablo was right; she had fled the scene long ago.

“Damn herrrrrrr!!” he screamed at the top of his lungs. It didn’t accomplish much. Glenda decided unilaterally to start this battle, and then she left Saare to deal with the fallout. It enraged him, but Diablo was right there, sporting his evil grin. It was time for Saare to worry about his own hide, not hers.

I can do this. I have to do this! I need to keep this going until Grigori returns!

With his hopes now pinned on his other stalwart companion, Saare roused his spirit. Grigori had gone to the city to lure the demon over to him. Their target was right here, and thus he should be back shortly. Believing in this, Saare plunged himself into this desperate battle—a fleeing wish that never had any hope of coming true.

As Saare faced these insurmountable odds, Grigori of the Three Battlesages was in a desperate situation of his own.

There, as he ran across the battlefield, he was greeted by a calamity from the skies. It was the mercenary force Yohm had brought on, seemingly fighting to protect the city gate. They were doing what seemed to be a fine job, fending off Farmus’s vanguard force.

This wasn’t the prey Grigori was supposed to be targeting. He had no interest in Farmus’s internal strife; it had nothing to do with him. He was only after the demon who killed Archbishop Reyhiem, and his intelligence stated that he’d be found working undercover in this town.

King Edward was accompanied by those specialists from the East when I saw him, he had thought. Unless they run off on him, I doubt I’ll have much work to do…

But now Grigori was faced with a much more present threat than a demon. It was a gigantic, fearsome wolf in his way.

The wolf, of course, was Ranga, wagging his tail with glee as he sprinted across the heavens. He was light, as light as a feather, and now his feet weren’t kicking against the ground at all. This was Skywalk, a technique only a small handful of magical beasts could hope to learn, and he had acquired it all too naturally.

To Ranga, however, this was a trivial detail. The waves of power released from his body were bringing him pure joy as he whirled around, feeling himself fill up with magical energy. His legs, covered in jet-black fur, were crackling with gold-colored lightning—his aura releasing electricity into the air, whether Ranga meant to or not. It was being controlled by the shining gold horns on his head, radiating a force like a crown, even as the lightning-infused fur shone black like a robe of darkness. He was the king of wolves, and now he had every bit of the majesty that title entailed.

Now he approached the speed of sound in the air, as he instantly sighted the group Diablo tipped him off about. Another moment, and he was back on solid ground—right in front of Grigori.

Accompanying Grigori was a small handful of the Lubelius Imperial Guard. The other five thousand with them were the second wave of Farmus knights sent by Edward as reinforcements.

One of the Farmus generals, an inexperienced member of the nobility, nervously approached.

“S-Sir Grigori, your orders?”

Hell if I know, he thought.

All of Farmus’s top-notch knights were long gone, erased from the world during the previous attempt to invade Tempest. What remained were the also-rans, the fighters whose skills and brainpower weren’t enough to join in last time. None of them could think for themselves; they relied fully on Grigori, this wonder child from exotic lands, without even the slightest sense of shame.

“General Gaston, you tackle the forces lagging behind us. You saw them advancing from the ground and the sky, right?”

The observation made Gaston come to his senses. “Very well. What about you, Sir Grigori…?”

“Me? Isn’t it obvious? I gotta take that guy on. Python, Garcia, you two join—”

Join Gaston and keep him guarded is what Grigori wanted to say, but he was interrupted by a dark gale-force wind rushing by.

“Wha…?!”

At a speed that only Grigori could react to, Ranga charged right into the forces Gaston led.

“Dammit!” Grigori shouted. “That stupid dog!!” He thrust his halberd forward with all his might; Ranga easily leaped out of harm’s way, then began exercising free rein to wreck the whole troop. Leaping up and down, he kept attacking and attacking, piling up the casualties. Neither Python, nor Garcia, nor all of their many companions could avoid the feast of violence, sending them all crashing to the ground.

And before long, those fangs were being bared at Grigori himself.

Gobta and Gabil were chasing Ranga as fast as they could.

“Come onnnn, Ranga, you’re too faaaast…”

“Indeed. I fear there will be no assignments left for us at the end of this.”

“My brother,” interjected Soka, “please, enough whining. Continue the chase.”

They were all bickering at one another just like usual, but everyone knew they were good friends. Only the three of them thought they were hiding it.

“Right!” bellowed Gobta. “Here we go!”

“Got it!”

Gobta triggered Shadow Motion, accompanied by a hundred of his goblin riders. Gabil flew ahead, a hundred members of Team Hiryu joining him. Soka, meanwhile, returned to Hakuro to give the field commander his report.

As the first person on the battlefield, Gobta was greeted by the sight of heaps of soldiers lying in what felt like a single spot. The knights still in the fray were in a loose circle around Ranga, keeping a prudent distance and praying that Grigori could defeat this beast. The downed knights were all the talented ones—or at least, those courageous enough to engage Ranga and keep Grigori guarded. They paid for that dearly, all gathered together in a heap because Ranga was using his front paws to toss them over there, ensuring he didn’t accidentally trample them to death.

The faces of all the praying knights were strained with despair. Their cheers, loud and enthusiastic at first, were now replaced with stony silence. Grigori was already covered from head to toe in wounds. Victory, at this point, would be a dream wrapped within a dream. Even with Impervious, the steel-like protection covering Grigori, in Ranga’s eye he was just a slightly tougher chew toy than usual. The fact that he couldn’t be knocked out simply meant he had to endure the pain that much longer.

“Whoa!” The sight half panicked Gobta. “That’s, uh, that’s a bad wolf, Ranga! He’s gonna die if you do any more of that!”

“Yes,” Gabil agreed, “we must heal him at once!”

The order made Ranga freeze in place. Noticing the sorry sight around him, he hunched over, tail pointed straight down, shrinking down in size.

“Um… Right. But doesn’t this human wish to play for a while longer…?”

Grigori was unconscious, a broken halberd still in his hand, as Ranga ruefully prodded him with a paw. It was just too pitiful a sight for Gobta and Gabil to stand. Just imagining themselves in his place…

“Um, no, no, I don’t think so, Ranga…”

“No, indeed! Best stop this for now, or else Sir Rimuru will never let you hear the end of it!”

The mention of Rimuru’s name forced Ranga to give. Looking at the two of them with his sad eyes, he finally gave up.

“Oh no. He’ll be angry at me…”

The freed Grigori’s face was caked with drool, his limbs going off in assorted slightly off-kilter directions. Just slightly, mind you, but still in no angle the human body was designed for. He was pretty seriously banged up, in other words, and it was a wonder he continued to draw breath.

But Grigori survived it all. And with the healing potion Gobta provided, he made a full recovery before the sun set on the day. His body may not have paid the price for the experience…but his self-esteem certainly did. In later years, he came to be known in his homeland as the Canophobe Crusader, for reasons he refused to divulge to the general public.



For the remaining forces, Gabil promised not to pursue them further if they retreated, an offer that General Gaston immediately accepted. Word was quickly sent to the battered and bruised forces still attacking the town gate.

So ended the siege of Migam before it really began. And as he left the scene, Gaston could be heard shouting “Beat them? How could we possibly beat them?!”—a quote that became far more famous worldwide than he probably intended.

Come on, Grigori…! Come on! Get over here!!

Saare couldn’t have wished that any harder for himself. But he was in luck—Grigori was coming, draped over Ranga’s back. In fact, Saare’s wish was about to come true in just a few more moments. Grigori probably wasn’t going to provide the services he was looking for, but for Saare right now, ignorance was bliss.

Besides, he reasoned, this Diablo was just too ridiculous a demon to deal with. Here he was, one of the most powerful human beings on the planet, and not even he could fully plumb the depths of this guy’s force. There was no doubting Diablo now. He really was more powerful than the demon lord Valentine. Why would he bother going out of his way to kill Archbishop Reyhiem? A few well-planted threats from Diablo, and he could get literally anyone to worship the ground he walked on.

So why did I even have to deal with this…?

Saare was still expending every effort possible to fend off Diablo’s barrage, but he knew the end was near. His endurance, and his mental acuity, were about to be exhausted.

“Heh-heh-heh-heh-heh… Come on. Put in some more effort. Show me an interesting skill or two.”

And the demon was gleefully enjoying the sight, too. Saare just wanted to cry. From the bottom of his heart, he wanted to go home.

He had been praised as a genius. He was long-lived, thanks to his elven blood, and his dauntless effort helped him sharpen his fighting style to a fine point. His reward for this was the unique skill All-Rounder, which let him fully understand and acquire an opponent’s art after seeing it only once. It worked on the same principle as Hinata’s Usurper, just geared specifically toward arts.

It went without saying that actually using these arts required superior physical ability. Saare knew that well, and thanks to that, he had mastered a wide variety of skills, including complex magic/arts combinations that were among the trickiest moves out there to perform. Adding magical effects like that to his own aura unlocked access to some incredibly powerful sword slashes. Thus he preferred to use Spiritslash, a basic Battlewill move and also the ultimate way to enhance one’s physical ability. To this he would add whatever element his current foe was weakest against, letting him unleash a strike that could rip through almost any enemy.

That was a source of pride to Saare—and none of that worked here. Before he could even deploy the magic, Diablo analyzed its structure and disassembled it. It robbed Saare of his ability to bend the laws of nature—and without that, there would be no miracles today. Instead, giving up on magic, he opted instead to just fight with the Battlewill art Aura Sword.

“Dammit,” he bitterly whispered.

The most frustrating thing about all this was how Diablo wasn’t even seriously trying yet. He could tell. The difference in magical skill alone was like comparing a grown adult to a newborn. The same was true in physical strength. Only in tactical skill, something that could be learned on the battlefield and nowhere else, could Saare safely consider himself close—but even then, Diablo was already closing the gap within the space of this fight. The speed of his growth was dizzying. If he wanted to, Diablo could’ve easily killed Saare right now.

And if he’s not, that must mean…

Diablo had no intention of ending his life. Which meant that someone else out there must have killed Reyhiem. But who?

Yes. Hinata never wanted to be involved with all this, and the incident occurred after she left—as if aiming for that exact moment. It’s so…

…so suspicious. Wait. Not even suspicious. It had to be the Seven Days Clergy behind this. Saare was sure of it. And just then:

(Saare, we’ve come to give you aid.)

(Rejoice! We shall destroy this demon together!)

(Hold the demon back for us. Our magic will take care of him.)

The air warped behind him as Saare felt a new presence, one bearing a stupefying amount of force. They were the members of the Seven Days Clergy—three of them in all—and despite the way they put it, the magic they were attempting to cast was far too dangerous to use in this space.

A good criminal always knows how to destroy the evidence. And in this case, the “evidence” was anyone who knew that Diablo didn’t kill Reyhiem. Which included the journalists on hand. They weren’t idiots—many of them had come to the same realization as Saare by now. It was the whole reason Diablo kept them around.

So if the Clergy wasn’t aiming for Diablo at all…

“Run! Get away!!”

Just as Saare turned toward the press and gave that warning, a massive fireball engulfed the entire area.

A white-hot bolt of force penetrated Hinata’s chest.

Hurriedly, I came over to help her up.

“Hey, you all right?”

“Ngh… Gaaah!”

She was coughing up blood. But through the pain, she still brought a hand to her chest, attempting to cast a spell. It failed—as it would, given that she couldn’t speak any longer. Instead she eased herself down, lying limp in my arms. The blood from her began to stain my clothes a bright shade of crimson.

Unless I did something, Hinata was going to die without ever knowing what happened. We could work out the timeline that led to this later. I took a potion out of my Stomach and sprinkled it over her chest. But while this would normally begin the healing process immediately, now—of all times—nothing happened.

Understood. The subject Hinata Sakaguchi possesses high resistance to magic. Her body automatically disassembles magicules, neutralizing their effects.

It cancels out magic?

“M-magic won’t work on Lady Hinata,” her assistant Arnaud said, shaking his head as he ran up to me. “Any recovery magic has to be holy in its alignment, or else it will be neutralized on contact…”

Ah. So holy magic, which didn’t work through magicules, was okay? A lot of good that did me. These potions were useless, then. In that case…

“In that case, don’t just stand there. Cast some holy magic on her!”

We needed something more effective. Hinata was still alive. If we used holy magic to heal her, she ought to be able to recover.

After I shouted at them, Arnaud and the other paladins began to act. But they couldn’t move. Something was blocking them—a ring of light, binding all the paladins. A group of people, each bearing a huge amount of power, had used a high-level teleportation spell to jump into our area, restraining Arnaud and the rest.

The two mystery visitors kneeled before me.

(Demon Lord Rimuru, it is a pleasure to meet you. We are members of the Seven Days Clergy, and we have come here to punish Hinata Sakaguchi for violating our orders…)

It sure was brazen of them.

Hinata was on the ground, barely conscious; Arnaud and the other paladins were all tied up; and then these guys show up. And I had heard of the Seven Days Clergy before. Adalmann didn’t seem to appreciate them too much. Very suspicious. I wanted to learn more from them, but things were kind of urgent right now.

“I don’t know what’s going on with you guys,” I said, trying to sound as annoyed as possible, “but don’t get between Hinata and me. We already settled things between ourselves, so I’m not gonna let her die.”

The Clergy raised their arms up high, making their disagreement clear. (Unfortunately, we must insist. Hinata, the woman there, has ignored the will of the god Luminus. This is blasphemy, and we must issue divine punishment in response.)

The gall of these guys. They teleport right into my backyard and think they can just say anything they want.

“B-but…!”

“Please, forgive Lady Hinata! She had her own motivations for this…”

The Clergy had no interests in the pleadings of the paladins.

“Don’t give me that crap!” one of them suddenly shouted. “You tricked all of us, didn’t you?! You wanted Lady Hinata dead from the start!”

This was the captain of that band of a hundred, the one who’d faced off against Shion. Then, suddenly, things began to get a little hectic…by which I mean, the paladin standing next to him took out his sword and plunged it into that captain’s body.

“Wha—? Garde, y-you…” the captain gasped.

“Such insolence, Renard. I refuse to allow you to speak so ill of the Seven Days. You were conspiring with the rebel Hinata all along, weren’t you? You’re the one who tricked us!”

The shouted accusation created a stir among the rest of the paladins. They had no idea who was telling the truth, I figured. That was how much political power this Clergy must’ve had over them. But that wasn’t true, was it? I mean, that heat beam or whatever came from Garde’s direction. Which meant…

…Well, it meant I had no idea what to do next. Things were so chaotic, there was no hope of putting them back in order. I wanted to take Hinata back from the brink of death, but the Clergy was in my way—and now Renard was betrayed by his own men and in mortal danger himself. And then the Clergy says they want Hinata dead for defying them, although they don’t seem to be hostile to me.

So now what…?

Job one was to save Hinata. Shizue asked me to, for one, but beyond that, I think we were just a few steps away from working everything out with each other. If we could make up, I figured that could lead to friendlier relations with both the Western Holy Church and the nation of Lubelius. Abandoning her was never an option for me.

“Look, I’ll hear all of you guys out later. This is my nation, and you need to follow my laws while you’re here. Um, you’re Arnaud, right? Cast your healing magic on Hinata now.”

My nation didn’t have laws, really, but I still had executive power, and I meant to wield it. But the Seven Days Clergy wasn’t impressed.

(We cannot allow that. The followers of Luminism have sworn absolute allegiance to the god Luminus. Even if the demon lord Rimuru wishes it, no one here will execute your request.)

They were keeping all the paladins from doing anything. It was so annoying. There was no time to try reasoning with them. I thought about forcing the issue—but just as I did, Diablo sent me a Thought Communication.

(Sir Rimuru, I have an emergency report—)

(What is it? Keep it short; I’m kind of busy.)

(Pardon me. I have discovered Reyhiem’s killer. It is a group known as the Seven Days Clergy; they appear to have devised all these events behind the scenes.)

(Hohh…)

(I am faced with three of them right now, and I fear that leaving them alive might cause harm for us later—)

(Can you provide evidence that they’re the killers?)

(We have a press corps full of journalists from around the world here as eyewitnesses, my lord.)

(…All right. Permission granted. Rub ’em out.)

(Yes sir!!)

What impeccable timing! Diablo definitely earned a nomination for Most Valuable Butler with that show. I had no idea how he had engineered this to work out so well, but I guess I had the right man for the job.

This solved a lot of riddles on my end. So the Seven Days Clergy were the bad guys here? Their motives were unclear to me, but I guess they were after Hinata, not me. They wanted her dead, presumably because she’d be trouble for them alive—and since she’d be too formidable a foe for them, they had hatched a scheme to turn the rest of the world against her.

The dude who just stabbed the paladin Renard must have been connected to them, too—or maybe he was a Seven Days member himself—but either way, this Garde guy was the real hit man here. He must’ve wanted a clean kill, but performing the crime right in front of me was a mistake. My Universal Detect was in operation, so doing the deed with me around was like shouting “I’m the killer!” as you pulled the trigger.

I suppose these were the guys who fiddled around with my message for Hinata, and I had to assume they interfered with Diablo’s plans, too. These were the culprits, and no one else—and now that I knew that, I didn’t have to worry about hurting my relationship with Lubelius.

This was my nation.

Originally, I had thought it best to leave them alive, but they had been a thorn in my side as well. I didn’t see much need for that now. If they were going to run on me, let’s just kill ’em off instead.

So leaving Diablo to take care of his own business, I began to take matters into my own hands. Time to let off a little steam.

“Benimaru! Soei!”

““Sir!”” they both shouted.

“Capture those two. If they resist, take any measures you deem necessary.”

“Just what I was waiting for!”

“As you wish, Sir Rimuru.”

Benimaru and Soei came for the Clergy, who immediately shot me a pair of dirty looks. I didn’t let it bother me.

“Shion!”

“Yes, my lord!”

“You take care of Garde over there for me.”

“…!”

“Watch out. He might be a Seven Days guy in disguise.”

“I see! Then let me show him the deepest pit in hell and expose him for what he is!”

She gleefully readied her massive sword. This time, I didn’t stop her. Hell, I was hoping to see that sucker.

(Heh…heh-heh… Well, look at this!)

(Are you quite sure? It will mean all-out war against us.)

Those two could babble all they wanted. If I let them be, it’d be even more trouble for us later— And if I was gonna take action here, better make it count.

“Sorry, guys, but you went too far. I guess you tried pinning the blame for Archbishop Reyhiem’s murder on me, but I’ve seen right through all that. If you’re picking a fight with me, I assume you know what’s coming for you, yeah?”

The paladins exchanged confused looks. A few of them, at least, seemed to see things my way. Arnaud, meanwhile, with an enraged expression, already had his sword pointed at the Clergy. But the pair didn’t look daunted. In fact, they were laughing in our faces.

(Heh-heh-heh! I didn’t think we would be found out.)

(Wah-ha-ha-ha-ha! But the Saint is already dead! Demon Lord Rimuru, you and Hinata both exhausted your strength in that battle, didn’t you?)

(We wouldn’t dream of missing this golden opportunity!)

(And if all of you know the truth as well, you will die with your demon lord!)

At least they weren’t making any more excuses. The Seven Days Clergy fully admitted to it, laughing the whole way. Such a vulgar display. It almost made me sick. There was no value in keeping them alive at all.

Benimaru, Soei, and Shion each sized up their prey. But it turns out the Clergy was craftier than I thought.

(Fools! I commend you for exposing us, but everything has already been accounted for.)

(We planned to kill all of you from the beginning!)

(Heh-heh-heh… Let us begin!)

With that, the two of them leaped back and floated into the air. Garde joined them, revealing his true colors before Shion could reach him. Then, with the three of them grouped together, they constructed a large-scale magic circle on the ground. This was dangerous—certainly beyond what a human of regular intelligence could handle, and certainly something that required advance preparation. Inside this circle was us, two of the Three Lycanthropeers, and the paladins. They intended to kill us all and make sure no evidence ever saw the light of day.

“Hellflare!!”

“Demonwire Slash.”

Dark pyres of flame shot out toward the trio, accompanied by a torrent of Sticky Steel Thread powerful enough to break through sheet metal. But the only sound anyone could hear was high-pitched laughter.

(Ridiculous! You waste your time! This magic circle deflects all non-holy strikes! Any magical attacks from evil creatures like yourselves could never penetrate it!)

(Wah-ha-ha! Such utter fools. Our knowledge has been built and refined over centuries. It will never lose out to the brute force of some arrogant monster horde!)

The laughter echoed above us, but I was too busy keeping Hinata alive. She had a temporary heart, made from my own body, but it took up a ton of magicules. I wasn’t used to pulling this off, and it wasn’t exactly a very compatible donor organ for her, so it wasn’t working as well as what I concocted for Mjurran.

Then Shion charged forward, ready to push all my concerns away.

“Shut up! That means nothing in the face of my Goriki-maru Version 2!!”

She wasn’t making much sense, but she made a mad dash for the Clergy, muscle memory winning out over her brain. It would have struck most people as idiotic. But Shion was on another level today.

(Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! You imbecile! What could that sword possibly—?!)

There was an audible ripping sound, out from the air in front of the sneering Clergy.

(N-no!)

(She’s going to break down the magic circle?!)

(So be it! We must release it now!!)

Shion’s nonsensical attack was pure brute force, something that didn’t care much about elements or attributes at all. In addition…

Understood. She appears to be using Guarantee Results, part of her Master Chef skill, to alter the space around her.

This is just crazy. I can only hope she doesn’t start using that stuff on me.

Report. While the possibility is slim, the subject Shion’s attack might be effective against you as well.

Aw, crap, really? Better make sure I never piss her off again.

This had taught me all over again how amazing she was, but sadly, even that couldn’t stop the Seven Days Clergy’s attack.

Report. Attack incoming.

Their broad-range annihilation attack was complete. Crap. What should I—?

Report. It is not a problem. The magic circle has already been analyzed.

The cool, refreshing voice of Raphael calmed my frayed nerves. Okay, uh, great. No problem at all, then. This magic circle looked kind of complex to me…but ah, I guess it was child’s play to the wise master here. I hated to dent the Clergy’s confidence and all, but I guess a riled Raphael could still outwit them.

(((Prepare to meet your doom! Trinity Break!!)))

Three voices chanted in unison to launch the spell. But all that effort was already in vain.

Report. Relaunching the ultimate skill Belzebuth.

Just as the professor reported that to me, Belzebuth swallowed up all the droplets of murderous light raining down from above. In a moment, they were all gone. Yikes. Set this thing to full blast, and it was a real monster. Even the paladins stared wide-eyed at me, shocked at the sight of all those missile blasts disappearing before their eyes.

But…wait a second. Didn’t I “sacrifice” Belzebuth when I fought Hinata just now?

Understood. The ultimate skill Belzebuth, Lord of Gluttony, was indeed sacrificed, but a copy had been backed up, so it was not a problem to reactivate.

Huhhh? Backed up? And why was Raphael using the past tense there? You gotta tell me about this crap, man! I thought I had lost that thing forever. The professor acted like this was all settled history, but I wasn’t sure I was willing to accept that.

Report. Rise in holy force detected. Main attack incoming.

Oops. That last strike wasn’t the main one?

(((Face your ruinous end, demon lord! Trinity Disintegration!!)))

Whoa, crap! Belzebuth ain’t gonna cut it now.

Report. It is not a problem. Invoke Absolute Defense from the ultimate skill Uriel, Lord of Vows?

Yes

No

Hey, hey! There’s the professor I know. That’s another yes, but… Hang on. Again, something didn’t seem right.

But even as I pondered this, the first Absolute Defense wave activated—a single, thin, transparent layer covering my skin. This was all it was—and this was all it took to perfectly disable Trinity Disintegration.

Right. Yeah. That’s the thing. That was definitely the first time I used that move. I had been using Multilayer Barrier up to now, not Absolute Defense.

Taking advantage of my Mind Accelerate speedup, I finally asked Raphael the question on my mind. Hey. Why didn’t you activate that earlier? I could’ve blocked that strike on Hinata with that thing!

The response was enough to push my frustration to the brink.

Understood. This is because the ultimate skill Uriel’s Absolute Defense may still be penetrated by spiritual particles on occasion. As a result, it was determined that invoking it would be meaningless.

Raphael made it sound like common sense. I swear, you don’t have to be such a perfectionist about this stuff…

The behavior of the spiritual particles that magicules were made of was apparently difficult to predict. They ignored time and space as they moved around, cutting straight through well near any barrier. The near-random elements that controlled their movements—the forces of nature that governed over these particles—made it impossible for Absolute Defense to handle them, unless you knew how they worked.

And yet, here I was, perfectly safe after that barrier just trounced Trinity Disintegration. What’s up with that? Did Raphael fully predict things this time?

Understood. In the previous Meltslash attack, Belzebuth both canceled out the strike and invoked Predation on it. This made it possible to gather enough information to successfully recognize the random elements involved. As a result, it became possible to predict and defend against holy attacks. In addition, you have also obtained the holy sword skill Meltslash.

Hmm…

What? Wait. Waaaaaaaaaiiiit. Huh? So you mean you sucked up Hinata’s sword on purpose back there?

……

Dude, don’t clam up on me, you bastard! I can totally picture you reacting like “Oh no, Rimuru got me” just now! Your silence is telling me everything I need to know!

Although… Wait a second. I know Raphael isn’t the type to take dangerous risks, but…could I have, like, survived a Meltslash blow without having to cancel it out with Belzebuth?

Understood. Of course. You lost a great deal of magical energy, but your material body could have been instantly reconstructed with Infinite Regeneration.

…So what were you so freaked out about? You didn’t just want to consume Meltslash so you could analyze it, did you?

……

Oh, more of that, huh? Bastard’s getting better and better at dodging my questions. More…malicious, you could say, or humanlike. You could tell me the guy was a living being, and I think I’d believe you.

But…I dunno, I suppose I would’ve wanted it, yeah. Wanted to withstand that attack, wanted to use it myself… Did it take that moment of desire to act upon it that quickly? What a crazy ability I had. It almost felt like it was going to waste on a bum like me.

Negative. I exist only for the sake of my master.

Pretty fast replying to that one, huh? Pfft. Thanks. Keep up the good work, partner! Just try not to keep any secrets from me.

Thus, within the dilated time Raphael and I bickered with each other, our entire conversation ended in a single real-world instant.

(No! That couldn’t… No!!)

(It is impossible. Such a ridiculous feat should never happen!)

(There could be no creature in this world who could withstand a direct blast of Disintegration…)

And so on and so forth.

All three of them were mightily confused, and…y’know, I could see why. Even I thought it was kind of freaky, and I allegedly cast it. The ultimate in holy magic, cast in triplicate no less, and I blocked it like a spit wad. If I were them, I probably wouldn’t want to accept it, either.

But that’s reality for you. It’s what you get for making me—or, I guess, Raphael—your enemy.

“All right. Now it’s our turn.”

Benimaru, Soei, and Shion nodded.

“Your fancy magic circle seems to have disappeared,” Benimaru said, a ball of flickering black flame in his hand. “Think you can withstand this a second time?”

The Seven Days Clergy visibly recoiled at the sight of this. Their hand was fully played, and they had nothing left to counter with.

Shion flashed a fearsome smile as she sized up her prey. “You can’t escape us, you pile of garbage. Prepare to die!”

Soei was silent, watching the Clergy’s movements with an unblinking eye. Alvis and Sufia, the Lycanthropeers, were watching over the paladins, making sure none of them stepped out of line. There were unlikely to be any more real threats among them, but no harm in being sure. Not like any would-be assassin among them could do much of anything now.

(Ngh…)

The Seven Days trio had now been herded into a single location. But they still refused to give up.

(Think this over carefully! We are the guardians of humankind! If you kill us, the followers of the god Luminus will not take it sitting down!)

(Exactly! Luminus’s rage will burn all of you to ashes!!)

(We will step back this time. Now that we know you are not evil, I am sure talks will proceed smoothly with the Western Nations. You will be good neighbors to each other…)

With a mix of intimidation and flattery, they deigned to negotiate with us. This was really starting to piss me off. It was time, I thought, to end this—

“…I seem to have caused quite a lot of trouble for you, Demon Lord Rimuru.”

—but then a cold, bracing voice echoed over us as a massive gate appeared, cutting through the air. The door opened, revealing a beautiful young woman. Between her unique silver hair and her heterochromatic eyes, there was no mistaking it—she was the demon lord Valentine herself, and I probably didn’t need to ask why she came.

(Gahh!)

(My… My lady…?!)

(What are you doing in a place like this…?)

The Clergy visibly withered in her presence, cowering in fear. Then they kneeled before her.

Well, then. I guess Valentine was actually the god Luminus this whole time. The realization struck me dumb.

Diablo, almost shaking with glee, let out an evil laugh.

(…All right. Permission granted. Rub ’em out.)

With those simple words from Rimuru, he had full permission to do as he pleased. He wanted these fools eliminated as quickly as possible, yes, but before that, there was some business to take care of.

He turned toward the press corps. “Now, everyone, are you all right?”

The fireball was blocked by the barrier Diablo built, keeping all the journalists unscathed. This barrier also kept all the demon hunters, as well as King Edward and his knights, safe from injury. Nothing based on magicules, including aspectual and spiritual magic, could penetrate it.

(Tch. Annoying little demon. You are capable of that much…?)

(A fearsome foe, indeed. It is time to show off our own holy force…)

(Prepare to launch!)

The Clergy, expecting to wrap this whole thing up in a matter of seconds, had to be surprised. No matter how powerful this demon was, destroying his physical body would eliminate any influence of his on this world. The moment he could no longer maintain his magical form, it was back to the spiritual realm for him.

Anticipating this, the Seven Days Clergy launched an ultimate-class magic the moment they arrived—Nuclear Flame, part of the nuclear family of aspectual magic. Three people were required to carry it out, the force of it being too much for one, and it rained unquenchable hellfire upon its target. Against Diablo, however, it was powerless.

Overwhelmed, the Clergy quickly opted for their final weapon. Defeating someone as powerful as Diablo required holy force, and nothing else. Their minds made up, they decided to bring out their finisher—Trinity Break. It was the same move their compatriots tried against Rimuru, and while it took some time to prepare, they could be protected by a barrier during casting, keeping them safe. What’s more, the Trinity Disintegration launched at the end of this spell was the most powerful of all holy magic, capable of reducing anyone and anything to its composite cells. No matter how great the monster or magic-born, from demon lords on down, this attack could never be resisted.

It was thus with total confidence that the Clergy uncorked this spell…just as Diablo began negotiating. Not with Seven Days, but with the press.

“Did you see that attack?” he gently asked. “It seems clear to me that they made an attempt on your lives, didn’t they?”

Even Saare, enemies with Diablo until a moment ago, couldn’t deny it. The journalists certainly didn’t. They all nodded their understanding. The guardians of humankind, the great heroes, the Seven Days Clergy of legend—everyone there knew of them. Diablo was telling the truth; they were sure a moment ago that they’d be breathing their last. The Clergy would bury them all, Diablo included, and then they’d pin the blame for it on the demon.

“But there is no need for alarm. I will protect you all.”

To the crowd, Diablo’s smile looked like the reassuring countenance of a benevolent god. They believed him. If he was powerful enough to shrug off a Battlesage like Saare that easily, beating the legendary Seven Days didn’t seem so fantastical, either.

“What, what do you want from us…?”

“Oh, money?”

Some among the press worried about what Diablo would desire in return. Demons never work for free—they always demand something back, and Diablo was no different. He’d never provide a service for no reason, unless he was doing it for Rimuru.

“Heh-heh-heh-heh-heh… I appreciate your understanding. I seek only one thing from all of you…”

His demand, given with a smile, was this: Report his innocence to the world. The journalists, hearing this, breathed a sigh of relief. They were expecting a cruel, merciless demon, but the truth was something else entirely.

If Saare, one of the chief officers in the Holy Empire of Lubelius, was caught up in the Clergy’s dragnet, it meant that group had to be conspiring on an impossibly high level behind the scenes. The journalists were being used, too, and once they knew that, there was no reason to turn down Diablo’s request.

“Of course! Let us spread the word far and wide!”

“Yes, we will write whatever you want! All about your glorious deeds!”

“That we will. So please! Please, help us!!”

There were nearly a hundred members of the press there, and all of them promised their loyalty. The unique skill Tempter was faithfully doing its work on them. Betrayal would not be forgiven. The pact had been forged.

“Heh-heh-heh-heh-heh… Very well. Then I promise to save all of you…but not you.”

The demon pointed at Edward, only now recovering from his fainting spell.

“Wh-why?! What did I ever do—?”

“Silence!” he spat out. “You openly mocked the great Sir Rimuru, a crime worth a thousand deaths. It is time for you to realize that saving you is worthless.”

Edward racked his hazy mind for some way out, but none came. The only thing for certain was that, if things kept up, he was going to die. He looked toward his knights; they averted their eyes. Defying the will of a monster like that, or the heroes of legend, was not conducive to their health.

“Please… Please, if you could, allow me to live…”

All that remained was to attempt a teary-eyed round of begging. It failed to bend Diablo’s heart.

“Heh-heh-heh-heh-heh… Feel free to continue lamenting your foolishness as you depart this realm.”

None of the press lifted a finger to help Edward. What could they do? Edward was the cause of all this in the first place; nobody was going to step in for him now and face that demon’s wrath.

The king, realizing this, started crying. “I’ll give you everything. My money, my position… My, my throne! I’ll abdicate and give you everything…”

Diablo paused, apparently giving this offer some serious thought. “Come to think of it,” he said, lightening his tone, “the hero Yohm is guarding Edmaris at the moment, is he not? I believe he is the only one qualified to truly lead the land of Farmus, but what do you think of that?”

Edward knew that. His mind, racing at speeds higher than he ever felt in his life, was sure of that.

“I—I agree with you! He has great potential. I would gladly announce him as my successor…”

The answer was a source of great satisfaction for Diablo. The journalists could sense it as well. A couple of them even began to laugh.

“Ha-ha-ha… The birth of a hero king, is it?”

“This is the news of the century…”

Diablo nodded contentedly. Now the table was set perfectly. A few of the details had gone awry in his plan, but the results wound up more than satisfactory.

Now all that remained was to sweep up the garbage.

The time had come.

(Hmph. Are you ready for this?)

(In just a few more moments, a rain of light will cleanse this realm of evil.)

(Enjoy what few remaining seconds you have left to—)

The Clergy had been watching these events from afar, assured that their upcoming spell would win the day for them. What arrived instead was a single moment of despair.

“Am I ready for what, exactly? Don’t make me laugh, you scum. You meddled with my plans and shamed me in front of Sir Rimuru—both serious crimes. You will taste the fear and despair I felt many, many times over.”

There wasn’t a trace of a smile on Diablo as he regarded the Seven Days. His face was expressionless, the beauty to it only adding to the fear factor.

(Wh-what…?)

(What are you saying?)

(Have you lost your mind? This spell could never—)

The Clergy was cut off by a snap of the fingers—and then the world was enveloped in horror.

“Enjoy the sensation of powerlessness in a crumbling world! …Moment of Despair!!”

This was Diablo’s power, taking advantage of Tempting World—one skill in the Tempter repertory. Normally, it worked directly on the target’s subconscious to affect their mental state, but Diablo had improved on it. It let him materialize a virtual world for its hapless victim, then exercise absolute control over that world. Diablo could even dictate who lived and died in this virtual realm—and then, with the help of the Truth Twist skill, he could switch out that pretend world for the real one. The phantoms and monsters crafted by him would take on real form in the physical plane.

It was as unfair a skill as it was inhumane. Breaking out of it could only be done with sheer willpower and a well-trained spiritual body—but almost nobody could defeat the spiritual life-form of Diablo in that contest, and not even the Seven Days Clergy was an exception.

(What, what is this?!)

(Our, our magic is disappearing?!)

(N-no…)

The three of them struggled in abject surprise, but there was nothing they could do. The clock ticked on their personal hell—and after a short while, their world collapsed.

“Enjoy reflecting upon your foolishness in the deepest pit of hell…”

It was time for the final flourish—End of the World, the final snuffing out of the Tempting World he created, taking everything inside with it. It swallowed up the Seven Days Clergy’s full despair, taking it all the way to the final second…

…and then the promises made in this battlefield were safely carried out.

Having the demon lord Valentine, er, Luminus show up was kind of a surprise, but now someone else was coming through the door. This was the so-called Valentine from Walpurgis, right? The stand-in for Luminus?

The three Clergy members here paled in his presence as they kept kneeling before Luminus. They had no interest in fighting any longer, trembling like lambs waiting for their judgment. So what would Luminus do? The way she apologized for causing me trouble, I suppose she wasn’t here for a fight, either.

But then the former stand-in opened his mouth. “Stand back,” he commanded, his voice projecting far and wide. “I am Louis, the Holy Emperor, and the presence you see here is our god—Lady Luminus!”

The paladins promptly fell to their knees. It reminded me of a certain retired lieutenant general—not that I said that to anyone. Instead, we decided to watch what would unfold, as confused as we all were about it.

But…a demon lord serving as a god? What kind of a joke is that? And that stand-in was the Holy Emperor? The propaganda getting thrown around was so ridiculous, I hardly knew what to make of it. Thinking about it, though, maybe this was the most effective way for her to position herself…

Affirmative. It would allow you to create the most efficient environment for ruling over the species of humanity.

Hmm. Yeah. But I wasn’t suggesting we copy that, all right? Don’t let me be misunderstood on that. Otherwise, I was scared of what Raphael might decide to try next.

“…Hinata,” Luminus said as she approached her knight, still cradled in my arms. “I told you to restrain yourself, but you decided to venture here anyway…”

She lifted a hand into the air.

“May your heart be revived. Resurrection!”

This was Resurrection, the miracle of god, in action. Before my eyes, the hole from Hinata’s back to the left side of her chest began to close up. This was even faster than my own recovery potion. Which…

…Wait a sec. Why did a “demon lord” wield holy energy like this?!

Understood. The “miracle of god” refers to the efficient utilization of spiritual particles. These particles cannot be intervened with normally, but I have discovered a way to do this. This will be analyzed later…

I didn’t really get Raphael, but I guess the wise master had a nice new project to tackle. That guy’s so helpful. Let’s leave the job to it for now.

“Nn-nnhg… Master…?”

Oops. Hinata’s back awake.

“Hey. Quit babbling,” I said. “What’s this ‘master’ talk? Who—?”

I couldn’t help but needle Hinata a little. It was funny to me. None of her usual grimness. She looked almost innocent now. She got summoned to this world during her high school years, right, and now she’s spent the past decade or so here? That put her at around—

—but before I could finish the thought, her eyes bored into me, just as icy as I remembered.

“…You.”

“Yes ma’am.”

“You weren’t thinking something rude just now, were you?”

“No, not at all.”

“Oh. All right. So how long do you plan to cling to me?”

Cling? She makes it sound so dirty. I was helping her this whole time, too. But now didn’t seem like the right time to complain about it, so I better just shut up and apologize. Sometimes, as you learned over time, losing was the best way to win.

“Oh, excuse me! Not that I minded it particularly!”

Hinata jumped away from me. Then she looked down at her chest. There was a hole in her clothing, revealing the pale skin below.

“…Huh?”

Crap. She wanted to kill me with every fiber of her body now. Did I step on a landmine there?

“Has anyone ever told you,” she asked as she glowered at me, “that you’re completely tactless?”

“You’re the one staring daggers into me right now. Why do you have to be so stubborn? You never listen to people!”

I didn’t mean to mouth off like that. That was a mistake. Hinata’s beauty turned into a mask of angry rage. I could hear her give me an exasperated tch. But she simply took a breath, bottling it up, and flashed me a smile—which was scarier, in a way.

“…Look. I’m just shortsighted sometimes, that’s all. You are tactless, aren’t you? I bet you had trouble getting dates your whole life.”

Her words pierced straight through my heart. A critical hit! Shut up, lady! Quit making me remember my forgotten past!

“I—I did not! People thought I was considerate and reliable!”

“Oh? Well, great,” she replied, giving me a look of pity as she chuckled. God, I hate her. Right at the end, she beat me good. I won the battle, but now I felt like such a loser. And, oh, wait, I never declared victory anyway…

Leaving me to deal with my shock alone, Hinata used her own healing magic to take care of Renard. Her spell did a hell of a job as well. I thought Luminus might’ve helped him out, but she couldn’t have cared less. I guess she’s the type to pretend people didn’t exist if she wasn’t interested in them. Hang in there, Renard. Guess he’s got it worse than I do, in a way.

By healing Hinata, Luminus had restored the paladins’ confidence in her. Some of them knew the Holy Emperor Louis’s name, too, and none seemed to question his presence here. Seeing Renard come back to life sent up a cheer among the troops, many shouting “Lady Hinata!” and crying their eyes out.

She punched out one dude she caught staring at her chest, though. That’s Hinata for you. Can’t let your guard down. What’s she talking about, being shortsighted? It’s not like she didn’t have Magic Sense on all the time. But I guess she was particularly sensitive to the wandering eyes of men, huh? Better be careful. Kinda too late for me, but…

After the commotion calmed down a bit, Luminus slowly opened her mouth.

“Now… Seven Days Clergy, what excuse do you intend to make for this?”

We all looked on, wondering how she was going to handle this. Then I got another message from Diablo.

(…The job is complete, Sir Rimuru.)

(Good. How did it go?)

(Heh-heh-heh-heh-heh! All according to plan.)

He sounded pretty happy with himself. Guess there were no more problems on his end.

(Excellent. Report back here to me once things settle down.)

(Yes, my lord. I look forward to it.)

Diablo closed the Thought Communication and went back to work. I guess he was no longer blamed for that murder, then—which meant I didn’t need to intervene in how Luminus decided to handle these Clergy guys. They were certainly a pain in the ass, but she had just apologized to me for it. Any further meddling would just complicate matters. Better just sit here and think about how to improve our future relations.

As I thought that, Luminus made her decision. She was judge, jury, and (as it turned out) executioner.

“I sentence all of you to death. At least allow me to guide you to your end by my own hand…”

(Have—have pity on us!)

(It was only for your sake, Lady Luminus…)

(I swear by our years of faith to you, please…)

They clung to her in the most pathetic way. She didn’t let them for long.

“…Death Blessing!!”

She spread her arms wide, and then the hand of an unseen god wrapped itself around the Clergy. It was, I suppose, one final act of pity for her servants.

A warm embrace of pity is all I could call it, but apparently it was much crueler than that, turning the living into the dead as it did. It was my first glimpse of the extent of Luminus’s power.

Thus, painlessly and all too easily, the Seven Days Clergy, who had attempted to trap us all in their cruel schemes, met their end. It came so quickly, I have to say. And here I was bracing myself for full war against the Holy Empire. Instead, it was now time to negotiate our future relations.

It wouldn’t do to stand around outside like this, so I decided to change locations, staging a sort of victory march back to town as I guided Luminus, Louis, and Hinata along.

Soon, I spotted Veldora back in town—and then I remembered.



“Oh, uh, sorry, the final defense line turned out to be unnecessary.”

“Aw, dammit! I was waiting here with bated breath, all this time…”

The news didn’t exactly thrill him, but he’d have to deal with it. Thus, everything was settled—or so I hoped. But the moment Veldora laid eyes on Luminus, he dropped another bombshell.

“Whoa…!! You! I remember you! I know I do! You’re Luminus, the demon lord Luminus! That vampire whose castle I blew to splinters! Wow, I’m glad I remembered! Otherwise, it’d be bothering me all day—”

He was stopped by the tip of a sword Luminus produced out of nowhere tapping against his neck. But, like, too late now, huh? He just went and proved to the world that the god Luminus was the demon lord Luminus Valentine.

The paladins were, uh, nonplussed. They fell silent, unable to parse this all at once. Hinata, apparently aware of this before now, put a hand to her forehead and sighed, while Louis just stood there like he was above it all.

Hoo boy. Time and time again, Veldora proved himself the biggest troublemaker I ever knew.

We all had to team up to restrain the enraged Luminus after that—“This accursed lizard! Getting in my hair every single damned time!!”—but that’s a story for another day.