

EPILOGUE

A NEW RELATIONSHIP

Deep inside the Inner Cloister, Gren, the Sunday Priest of the Seven Days Clergy, was waiting for his comrades to return from their mission. There had been some complications with the elimination of Hinata, leading to an emergency request from Arze. Failure wasn’t an option here, so Dena and Vena went out to join them.

That woman has too keen a mind for her own good. We need her out of the picture before she obstructs our plans any further. We must use that demon lord, that god Luminus, if we wish to become the true rulers…

Gren had served Luminus for several hundred years with that secret ambition in his mind, weeding out anyone too talented (and therefore dangerous) for his liking. The fellow Clergy under him did their jobs well, portraying him as a loyal servant to the faith, and it was easy to make them move on his behalf. Luminus liked him, and if he could appeal to people’s sense of jealousy about that, they did whatever he wanted them to do—just as he knew they would this time.

Arze was on his way to assassinate Hinata, disguising himself as the paladin Garde after the original one had been “dealt with” on the sly. Everything was in place. The disguise was the product of Dena’s own sorcery; nobody could see through it.

The Dragonbuster he gifted Hinata was equipped with a device that caused it to self-destruct anytime he wanted. If it broke right when the demon lord Rimuru attacked her, that would be enough to ensure her defeat. But she didn’t use it—and even worse, she started with a leg up in the fight.

Hearing that, Gren decided a change of plans was in order. If Rimuru killed Hinata, then great. If he didn’t, Arze could seal the deal instead. Then the Clergy could move to kill any eyewitnesses and assuage Rimuru, earning his trust and ensuring things would go in the right direction.

But the problems just kept piling up. The demon in the Farmus province of Migam proved much stronger, and craftier, than predicted. Throwing that strength around—that forceful, almost unfair strength—had planted doubts in the minds of the journalists Gren went through the trouble of assembling for the event.

A frantic report from the Saturday Priest, Zaus, who was observing the fray, convinced him to send out the Wednesday Priest, Melis, and the Thursday Priest, Thalun. The witnesses all needed to be killed, and the entire crime had to be pinned on the demon. Framing it as divine punishment for the demon’s unspeakably cruel actions would be enough to paint the Seven Days as the just side of this conflict. Just put it all on the demon, not on the demon lord Rimuru, and all was well.

If negotiations proved difficult, that’s where the god Luminus would come in. Rimuru was keen on establishing a foothold in the Western Nations—if he was declared a divine enemy, he’d be effectively shut off from that. The Clergy had more than enough bargaining chips to work with.

Gren had the situation read perfectly. There was no doubting the success of his plan. If there was any loose end to it, it lay in that demon Diablo’s insane amount of power…but Thalun was second only to Gren himself in force, and with him on the scene, “Sunday” was positive that victory was theirs.

But none of them had come back yet.

What could they be doing? he asked himself, the question appearing on his lips. Nobody was around to answer…except someone was.

“Whatever is the matter? You look very peeved about something.”

(You… Why are you here…?)

Surprised, Gren turned around. Cardinal Nicolaus, Hinata’s close confidant, had entered the room without permission.

“Well, I’ve made quite an interesting discovery, you see.”

(A discovery?)

“Yes. This.”

Nicolaus took out the crystal ball containing Rimuru’s message.

(And what—?)

“I’ve found evidence this has been tampered with,” he replied. Interrupting a legendary hero was frightfully rude of him, but Nicolaus didn’t seem to care at all. A visibly annoyed Gren looked at the crystal; it was playing the full message, including the parts he thought he deleted.

(…?!)

Picking up on Gren’s disturbed reaction, Nicolaus continued. “I have to say, I don’t care very much about what your objectives are. I don’t even care if you use the favor you enjoy from our god Luminus for your own aims…”

(What are you talking about? Our god is a concept. A concept that lies in the hearts of us all—)

“Don’t try to trick me. I realized ages ago that the god Luminus exists. Lady Hinata kept it a secret, so I simply followed her lead. But as I said, I truly didn’t care.”

Nor did I care about how you tried using this god, Gren could almost hear Nicolaus saying to himself. He opened his eyes wide; Nicolaus returned the gaze with a thoughtful-looking expression, his eyes as eerie and his emotions as opaque as the waters of a marsh.

(You…)

“Elders as destructive as you have no place in this world. Disintegration!!”

(No—?!)

Gren had no time to say anything else, his face frozen in surprise as he disappeared into the storm of light particles and faded from sight.

“Accursed insect. You thought I’d let you do harm to Lady Hinata?”

With those parting words, Nicolaus returned to his study as if nothing was amiss.

The good cardinal was more than just Hinata’s confidant. He was also her biggest fan in the world. And to him, all this religion was another way for him to stay connected to her. This made him a heretic, a nonbeliever at the highest echelons of the Papacy. His faith was directed toward no god at all, but a single mortal woman.

Inside a warm, firelit room, Granville Rozzo sat on a heavy, padded chair and meditated.

“Nicolaus… Curse you…”

He opened his eyes, the blinding light of the Disintegration burned into his mind. As well it should. For Granville Rozzo was none other than Gren himself, the Sunday Priest and leader of the Seven Days Clergy. He had the ability to send his spiritual power into other people, possessing their bodies, and he had just transferred himself to another host the other day. Now all that effort was wasted.

Today’s experience was a chilling one, even for him. If that had been his actual body, the cardinal really could’ve ended his life. That only added to Granville’s rage.

But perhaps the time was ripe to pull out anyway.

As he opened his eyes, he sensed Glenda approaching his mansion. It meant things had not gone according to plan. It was all a failure.

The moment she stormed into the room and saw Granville, Glenda began shouting.

“Sir Granville, we couldn’t do it! There’s no way I could handle that monster! It’s crazy!”

She looked exhausted, like she ran all the way here from the battlefield. There was no doubting her. It was the truth.

“What about the other Battlesages? If you took him on as a team…”

“No, I tell you, he’s just not on that level. In battle, you know, my nose is highly sensitive to the smell of death. I decided this was all trouble for me, so I pushed the battle on Saare’s shoulders and ran off. That guy’s a demon lord–class foe—maybe even stronger, for all I know.”

It sounded like an exaggeration to Granville, but he had still received no contact from his Seven Days companions. He even sought out their presences, somewhere in the battle over there, and found nothing.

“No…”

As much as it shocked Granville, it was the incontrovertible truth.

Several days later, the spies he had deployed across the land informed him that King Edward had been deposed. The journalists on the scene were all safe at home, reporting their accounts far and wide. There were even rumors from Blumund that Tempest was planning a grand festival for themselves.

Putting all these reports together, the only conclusion to make was that Granville’s plan had failed. The Seven Days Clergy, Granville included, were no more; the good name of the god Luminus could no longer be leveraged.

Then his beloved Maribel gave another prediction:

“It’s dangerous. Too dangerous. That town is too dangerous!”

Granville failed to understand what this meant.

“You mean the angels’ attack?”

“No. No, Grandfather. That demon lord seeks to rule the world through economic policy.”

Ruling the human realms through their finances—that was the aim of the Rozzo family, the exact plan Granville had underway this very moment.

“He couldn’t be…”

“It’s true. It’s really going to happen. That’s why…we need to crush him.”

Maribel wasn’t one for lying—at least, not up to now. It made her suggestions worth listening to all the more.

“I see. Well, if that’s what you say, I’m sure it shall be so.”

After all, Maribel was both Granville’s direct descendant…

“It will. Next time, for sure, it will happen. I swear it on my name as Maribel the Greedy!”

…and a reincarnated girl. The future hope of the Rozzos, gifted with knowledge of the “other” world and an uncommon amount of power. As long as she lived, Granville thought as the flames of ambition began to burn anew, the family would never be defeated.

It didn’t exactly come easy, but I patched things up with Luminus and cleared up the drama between myself and Hinata. In exchange, as a sort of apology, they agreed to send out a Western Holy Church missive declaring us to be harmless.

All this came about because of how hard it was for us to understand each other. I’m sure it wouldn’t be the last time, either. But I think this was also a lesson for both sides, a trial we should strive to overcome and improve ourselves with.

The occasion also led us to reconsider the relationship between Tempest and the Holy Empire of Lubelius. For the time being, we agreed to sign a nonaggression treaty and give tacit consent not to meddle in each other’s affairs. The whole, uh, “thing” with Veldora was an outstanding issue, but it was no skin off my nose, really. More of a personal problem. Veldora’s, that is. Not a Tempest matter— That’s my story, and I’m sticking to it.

Luminus was clearly reluctant to leave it at that, but I promised her that I wouldn’t intervene in anything involving the guy, and she grudgingly agreed to that. Besides, I had the ultimate skill Veldora, Lord of the Storm, on me, and as long as I did, Veldora was de facto immortal. Even if something popped up, I didn’t expect any problems.

Understood. There will be no problems.

Good.

So yeah, it was pretty much selling off my best friend, but I served Veldora up as a sacrificial pawn to quell Luminus’s rage. I thought I heard something along the lines of “Nraaahhh! Are you abandoning me?!” from him, but I’m sure I was just imagining things. It was kind of his fault, besides, and I can’t babysit him through every little thing. Kind of sad, maybe, but it’s all part of growing up.

Thus, with a small sacrifice on my part, we had regained our peace. I had no idea how this got worked out so fast, but Yohm was even ascending to the throne. That whole bit was going along great, I heard; all that remained was to wait for the big coronation day. It felt nice, seeing every one of these problems fall all at once like dominoes.

And from that day forward, we were formally accepted by the Western Nations.



