Overlord Volume 10 where?

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2017

Volume 12 Chapter 1

The Demon Emperor Jaldabaoth

Part 1

The Roble Holy Kingdom was a nation whose territory was the peninsula to the southwest of the Re-Estize Kingdom.

It was led by a Holy Queen who could use divine magic, and the leadership was closely tied to the temple factions. It was a very religious country, though not to the extent of the Slaine Theocracy.

In addition, there were two special features about the Roble Holy Kingdom’s geography.

The first was that its land was divided into northern and southern halves by the sea. Of course, the halves were not completely separated. Rather, there was a gigantic bay between them — forty kilometers long and two hundred kilometers wide — which made its geography look like a horizontal U.

Thus, some people called them the Northern and Southern Holy Kingdoms.

Then, there was another feature.

The entrance to the peninsula sported a great wall, over one hundred kilometers long from north to south.

It was built to withstand invasions from the many demihuman tribes which occupied the hills to the east of the Holy Kingdom, between them and the Theocracy.

This grand wall, built through the expenditure of a great deal of time and resources, was a silent testimony to how troubling the existence of the demihumans were to the Holy Kingdom.

There was a vast power gap between demihumans and humans.

Granted, it was true that there were certain demihumans who were weaker than humans, such as Goblins.

Be it in height, physical strength, knowledge, or the rate at which they produced magic casters, they were a race inferior to humans in every way.

Still, even Goblins like that possessed eyes which could see in the dark, and if they took advantage of the fact that their small bodies could be easily concealed — for instance, when launching a nighttime ambush in a forest — they would surely be troublesome foes for humans.

Needless to say, most demihumans had more powerful bodies than humans, and there were also many races who were naturally endowed with magical ability. If they let the demihumans invade as they pleased, they would have to pay an incalculable price in blood to fight them off.

Therefore, the Holy Kingdom chose to solidify its defense.

They did this to keep the demihumans from taking a single step onto their land.

They did this to let the world know that their land did not belong to the demihumans.

They did this so the demihumans would understand that any attempt to set foot on their land would be met by frenzied resistance.

♦ ♦ ♦

Yet, the wall built for that purpose possessed a few problems.

In order to keep it operating at full capacity, they had to keep a great deal of manpower permanently on site. The Holy Kingdom’s leadership had once calculated how much fighting strength would be required to defeat an invading tribe of demihumans. The answer was that the country would collapse before the demihumans even attacked them.

While they did not have the luxury of raising troops which would go unused, there was a need to station an appropriate amount of manpower there.

In the Holy Kingdom’s history — after the construction of the wall — the gravest intrusion into their lands had come during an invasion which took place amidst the Long Rain.

It was a night attack, launched by a race called the Srush, who possessed sucker-cup hands, tongues envenomed with a paralytic toxin which could extend a long way, and advanced members of their species could even change their skin color as though using the 「Camouflage」 spell.

The Srush crossed the wall, and headed west.

Quite a number of villages had been lost to them, and such was the tragedy which had unfolded back then that to this day, there were still rumors about whether or not the Srush were still hiding within the borders of the Holy Kingdom.

They wanted to fully man the wall in order to prevent such a tragedy from occurring again, but stationing troops at every single point along its length would strain the nation. The compromise which the nation came up with was to build small forts at fixed intervals along the walls. These strongpoints would then be overseen by several gigantic fortresses.

They stationed a small number of troops in each of these strongpoints, their purpose being to fight extended battles down to the last man. If they encountered an enemy attack, they would immediately launch skyrockets to request reinforcements from the fortresses. In addition, there were companies of soldiers who would staff and patrol the fortresses, serving as reserve troops during emergencies, to be deployed flexibly as the situation required.

After putting these measures into practice, the demihumans had not managed to penetrate the wall again.

However, the diligent planning of the Holy Kingdom’s leadership back then had turned into a form of obsession. Even countermeasures like a defensive line of fortresses could not reassure them.

Indeed, it was an incredibly massive wall — to human beings. Yet, it was no threat whatsoever to races who were several times taller than humans or who possessed the ability of flight. For those reasons, even such a sturdy wall was by no means a guarantee of absolute safety when one considered the many special abilities of demihumans.

The Holy King at the time was a prudent man, and he had even prepared a stratagem for when the wall was breached. His solution was to mobilize the entire nation.

For that reason, the citizens of the Holy Kingdom were conscripted as a form of national service. All adult citizens, male and female, would spend a certain necessary amount of time undergoing military training, after which they would be assigned to sentry duty on the wall. The hope was that they would become the manpower with which to protect their land in case the demihumans crossed over the wall.

All residences above a certain size were also fortified. This gave the local villagers enough fighting power to hold out until the regular army could arrive, and allowed said villages to serve as military outposts. In the end, the villages of the Roble Kingdom were far better protected than those of other countries, and they could also function as military bases.

♦ ♦ ♦

The Holy Kingdom’s fortress line was composed of three fortresses linked by the wall. Each of them protected one of only three fortified gates along the full length of the wall, which was in excess of one hundred kilometers long, and they also functioned as garrisons to dispatch troops to the surrounding strongholds. If the demihumans invaded and an overall mobilization order was given, they would become staging areas where the troops would gather in order to attack the enemy.

This was one of them, the central fortress.

As the sun slowly sank beneath the horizon, the red-tinted land was slowly soaked with the color of night.

A powerful-looking man stood with one foot on the battlements, looking out over the land — at the western foothills. After that, he put his foot down.

He was a man who bulged with muscle.

His neck was stout, and his chest muscles were impressive enough that one could sense them even through his thick armor. His powerful arms protruded from his rolled-up sleeves. There was no better way to describe him than “athletic,” regardless of which part of him one looked at.

His face was like a boulder, weathered by harsh conditions, and his thick brows and unkempt moustache spoke of a savage, wild nature. His mighty body and his stern appearance ought to have matched each other, yet his eyes broke that trend.

They were tiny and round, beady like those of a small animal, and they felt almost comically out of place.

Such a man now looked to the sky.

The wind carried the thin clouds at incredible speeds, but even the starry night beyond their gossamer veil could not produce enough starlight to illuminate the land.

The man’s nostrils flared, and he took a deep breath, smelling the breath of night through the early autumn air, which was flavored with a hint of winter chill. The violet night sky was swallowing the faint light of dusk upon the horizon with a speed visible to the naked eye.

The man turned his back to the hills, and looked at the men around him.

They were fierce warriors, who trusted him and who followed him. It was because he was surrounded by such warriors that he permitted himself a moment’s laxity.

After all, the day’s work was done and nobody could dispute that.

“—Oi, has anyone asked the forecaster about tonight’s weather?”

The question was asked in a mighty voice which befitted his powerful body. The soldiers looked at each other, and one of them spoke up on the group’s behalf.

“My deepest apologies! Corporal Camparno sir, it seems none of us have heard the report in question!”

This man — Olrand Camparno — was a fairly low ranked man in the Roble Holy Kingdom’s military hierarchy.

From bottom to top, the Roble Holy Kingdom’s military ranks went from Recruit, Private, Private First Class, Corporal, Sergeant, Platoon Sergeant, and so on. Of course, different ranks existed in different units, and these were simply the ranks for the regular infantry.

Usually speaking, a simple corporal would not need to be addressed as “Sir.”

However, the man calling Olrand “Sir” did not do so to mock him. His respect for him was evident in his attitude and tone. Neither was it just that man; every soldier present, each of whom walked and talked like a skilled veteran of many battles, felt the same way about Olrand.

“Really now?”

Olrand slowly stroked his stubbly face.

“Sir, if time permits, will you allow this one to go and ask immediately?”

“Hm? No, no need for that. Our job is over now. What happens next is the business of the people after us.”

♦ ♦ ♦

Olrand Camparno.

He was a man of many accomplishments who, through his fighting skill alone, had earned the honor of being named one of the Holy Kingdom’s Nine Colors by the previous Holy King.

The reason why such a man remained at such a lowly post stemmed from two problems which Olrand had.

The first was because he was very free-spirited — he hated taking orders.

The second was because he was obsessed with fighting skills.

When these two points came together, they led to a way of life that said, “If you want to tell me what to do, beat the crap out of me first.” If he met a worthy foe he would say, “You look pretty strong. How about sparring with me?” and then they would fight until one of them passed out.

This personality of his had led to many violent incidents involving nobles and his superiors, so he had been demoted over ten times already.

There was no need for people who could not obey orders in the military and they were universally loathed as well. Under normal circumstances, it would hardly have been strange if he were disciplined or dishonorably discharged. However, he had not met with such a fate, purely due to his strength. In addition, there were those who admired men like him.

The rough sorts who were unhappy about being ordered about by destitute nobles found Olrand’s way of living by the strength of his arm most thrilling

His unit was a squad of delinquents composed of such violent people — no, they were more of a gang.

They were quite numerous, so calling them a company would not have been out of place. In addition, its members may not have been Olrand’s equals, but they were all skilled fighters, which led to him assuming an unofficial post which his superiors could not tolerate, but which they could do nothing about.

♦ ♦ ♦

Olrand glanced around, and after verifying the identity of the man approaching them, a smile appeared on his face, like that of a carnivore about to pounce its prey.

That man seemed quite slender in comparison to Olrand’s brawny form. However, his was not the scrawniness of a twig. Rather, he had a wiry, steely look about him. If one forged and reforged a man, burning away everything unrelated to his intended function, it would produce a textbook slimness of the kind he embodied.

In addition, his narrow eyes were keen, as though he was about to attack at any moment. Then there were his narrow pupils which did not look like they belonged to anyone engaged in a legitimate enterprise. In polite terms, he was an assassin. In less than polite terms, he was a mass murderer.

“Speak of the devil and here he comes. Fancy meeting you here, Night Shift-san. Nice to see you~”

The other man made no sound as he approached them with silent footsteps. He was dressed very differently from Olrand.

Olrand and the men around him wore suits of heavy leather armor made from the hides of magical beasts called Lanca Cattle. In addition, they carried small round shields and single-edged swords, the standard outfit of the Holy Kingdom’s superior troops. Incidentally, Olrand was the only one who had eight of those swords at his waist.

In contrast to that, the other man wore a suit of enchanted light leather armor. There was an owl crest stitched on his right chest, while the emblem of the Holy Kingdom adorned his left.

“...Olrand. I haven’t received your shift report yet. Also, is that the attitude you ought to be taking with a superior? That’s practically insubordination. How many times do I have to remind you of that?”

“Well, do forgive me, Platoon Sergeant-dono.”

As Olrand saluted him sloppily, the men under him saluted as well. It was a proper salute, the kind which they would never give a nobleman or any mere superior officer. It was a salute which showed genuine respect.

The man sighed with a haaah. It was a sigh made by one who knew that his conduct was unacceptable, but who also knew that lecturing him about it would be pointless.

Sorry, boss. Old habits die hard, as they say.

The reason why Olrand saluted this man, however reluctantly, was because he had defeated Olrand.

I’d like to beat you once before I leave this place. On your terms. Don’t you think, Platoon Sergeant Pavel Baraja?

The man — Pavel Baraja — was nicknamed “The Night Watchman.” Like Olrand, he was one of the Nine Colors. The massive, exquisitely-made bow on his back gleamed with the faint light of magic, and the quiver hanging at his waist glowed in the same way. He was an archer, just as his appearance suggested. He was a superb marksman, with a reputation of perfect accuracy.

“I think this all the time, but working at night sure is hard. The demihumans do just fine in the darkness but it’s hard enough just to find their traces, let alone fight them.”

“That’s why we’re here. The only way to gain magic and talents comparable to demihumans — their vision aside — is through training. And we’ve received that training.”

“Yes, yes. Same goes for that daughter you’re so proud of, right?”

Pavel’s face twitched and Olrand instantly regretted his poor choice of words.

This was a man whose expression remained unchanged even in the midst of a drinking party. The only exception was when the topic of his daughter and wife came up. That was where the problem lay.

“Oh yes. She’s an outstanding girl.”

—It was happening. It had already begun.

Pavel paid no heed to Olrand's regret and continued speaking.

“That said, I honestly have no idea why she wants to become a paladin. She’s weak little girl, certainly not the type who thinks of fighting power as everything — honestly, she’s even been scared to tears by caterpillars in the past — and while I did say that might was everything just now, that doesn’t extend to my wife… although my wife does seem like that in some ways — and she’s adorable because she grew up like me, no, I should say that it’s a pity she ended up growing up to look like me — but the true shame is that she doesn’t have any talent for using swords. However, she’s adept with the bow. If only she could hone her skills in that respect, but then here she is wanting to be a paladin and whatnot—”

He let the meandering monologue flow in one ear and out the other, making the appropriate noises in response when they were needed, but it would seem he had still been found out.

“Oi, are you listening to me?”

That question was only to be expected.

No, I wasn’t listening. I think I stopped after the third time.

After hearing the same thing about five or six times, under normal circumstances Olrand would have unhappily retorted “Hell no.” However, taking that tone with Pavel would be a terrible mistake. That was because he knew that he would surely reply, “Then I’ll tell you again.”

This was the right answer:

“Of course I did. What a lovely girl she is!”

Pavel’s face changed dramatically. While it was an ugly, fiendish expression that put Olrand on his guard, the fact was that the other man was simply embarrassed.

If he did not capitalize on the way Pavel’s mind was savoring the joy of hearing his daughter being praised by others and overcome Pavel’s desire to praise his daughter, he would be plunged into that hell once more.

“Also—”

Only one thing could trump the topic of his daughter. That was work.

“Doesn’t night work mess with your biological clock? Won’t your body get weird?”

The butcher’s expression on Pavel’s face returned to his usual killer’s expression.

“...How many times have you asked that question already? The answer’s the same as always; it’s nothing to be concerned about. Still, why do you keep asking that question? What are you really getting at?”

He knew the cause for it, but he still stared at his rapid shift in attitude.

Where did the you from just now go, he wanted to say, but Olrand did not want that hell to return once more.

“...Hah. What I really want to say? Well, that’s a surprising question… I was just thinking that it’d cause a lot of trouble for me if the man who beat me ruined his body and ended up having to retire over a trivial thing. Of course, once I win, such minor things won’t matter any more.”

In the past, Olrand had been full of himself when he was first assigned to this strongpoint, and thinking back to those days embarrassed him. Skilled soldiers gathered around him in admiration, fuelling his ego ever further, and somehow, he had ended up fighting a mock battle with Pavel.

Olrand favored the sword — close combat. In contrast, Pavel favored the bow — ranged combat.

If the two of them clashed, the question of engagement range would be extremely important. However, Pavel declared that he was fine with close combat.

And then, Olrand lost.

Olrand respected Pavel for that reason. At the same time, he harbored the desire to beat him next time. This time, he would fight Pavel in his field of expertise, ranged combat, and emerge the victor there.

“Is that so? You want to fight me, then? While I’m at peak physical condition, with no handicaps on my part.”

A bestial smile crossed Pavel’s face as he said so, and it made Olrand’s chest heat up.

Oh yes, definitely. Isn’t that obvious? I want to fight you. I want to put my life on the line against you. However, that won’t be allowed, will it? Even so, if possible, I’d like us to have a battle where both of us could die at any moment. That’s how I want to fight you.

However, Olrand remained silent. That was because his instincts said there was no telling where the beast before his eyes would go. And in fact, what Pavel said after that confirmed those instincts.

“Still, I have to apologize. You should know why too.There’s very few people who can beat you as you are now in melee combat, and I’m not one of them.”

Then let’s settle it with ranged combat. Those words did not issue from Olrand’s mouth. That was because he knew it would only be an insult to a worthy opponent.

He recalled Pavel’s bow skills. He was still not confident that he could evade his attacks and close the distance at the same time.

—No, not yet.

“Well, if that’s all, time to make your report.”

“No need to rush, boss. It’s not time for the shift change yet, right? Look, the bell hasn’t rung yet.”

Indeed, the chime that signalled a shift change had not yet sounded.

“You still need to prepare to change shifts, right? There’s things to do before the bell goes. You ought to be getting yourself ready so you can change over the moment the bell rings.”

“It’s still too early even for that, right boss? Come talk with us for a bit.”

“Then, may I make a report to the Platoon Sergeant’s second-in-command?”

The person who spoke was one of his men.

“Oh, that’s a great idea. Excellent job, you. How about that, boss?”

“...Hah. You’re being really persistent today. You want to say something, right? Good grief... if you want to say something, come out and say it.”

But of course, he could not.

While he had acknowledged the other man as someone he could talk with because he respected him, Olrand was the type who did not speak to people precisely because he respected them. That was because he wanted to be seen as a man who could stand on his own.

“Well, that’s why you’re the boss. You get it, don’t you?”

“...Hahhh. So, what is it? I won’t let you off lightly if it’s some trivial nonsense.”

“Well, about that...” Olrand took off his helmet and scratched his head. The cool air felt strangely comfortable on his heated scalp.

“The truth is I want to go on a warrior’s pilgrimage. So can I leave this place?”

He could hear the gasps of surprise from all around him. However, the expression on the slender man in front of him remained unmoved.

“Why tell me?”

“That’s because you’re the man I respect the most in this nation, boss. If you won’t stop me either, then I won’t have any more doubts.”

“...Aren’t you an NCO? If you’ve finished your conscription period, I can’t possibly stop you.”

The Holy Kingdom practiced conscription. Therefore, they sometimes called those people who chose to be career soldiers noncommissioned officers, in order to differentiate them from those people who had been conscripted. Pavel and all his men were NCOs, while Olrand had some NCOs and conscripts under his command.

“In that case, you don’t mind if I quit, right?”

Being asked that question marked the first time Pavel’s face had changed apart from when the topic of his wife and daughter had come up. Olrand had barely managed to discover it by dint of his extraordinary powers of perception gained from being a warrior. Nobody else around them had noticed it.

He was someone that Olrand acknowledged as a man of steel, but he was actually perturbed by the question of his staying or departure. His heart swirled with a mix of delight and sorrow.

“...Well, legally speaking, I have to accept that. I can’t stop you… That said, we’ll sorely feel the absence of a strong man like you. You should have gone on your warrior’s journey earlier, right? Why now? Is it because there aren’t any more demihuman attacks?”

Since that time half a year ago, the demihumans had stopped attacking this fortress. In the past, they had attacked about once or twice a month, in groups of about a few dozen each time.

While they only numbered a few dozen, they were still demihumans, who had superior physical abilities compared to mankind, and many of them possessed special abilities on top of that. Those were numbers which could easily slaughter an entire outpost wholesale.

Both Olrand and Pavel had experienced many situations where they had to send out elite troops for relief operations.

“You know I don’t enjoy slaughtering the demihumans, right? I like fighting strong people and becoming strong.”

“So how about the Grand King, then?”

“Ahhh, that guy…”

“Oh, and then there’s the Demon Claw, the Beast Emperor, the Ashen King, the Iceflame Lightning, and the Spiral Lance.”

Pavel had mentioned the nicknames of several notable demihumans, but none of them moved Olrand’s heart apart from the one he had first mentioned.

The Grand King Buser.

He was the king of a certain demihuman tribe, a being known as the Lord of Destruction.

That nickname came from the fact that he was skilled in martial arts that destroyed weaponry and his fighting style that revolved around such sundering techniques. He was a mortal enemy of the Holy Kingdom who had defeated many famed warriors, and he had fought Olrand in the past. Back then, he had destroyed Olrand’s longsword, his backup weapons of a shortsword and handaxe, and even a billhook used to cut trees for firewood.

Although he had broken all of Olrand’s weapons, the Grand King withdrew after seeing the reinforcements sent from the fortress. In a sense, being able to hold out until help arrived was a win for Olrand, and many people praised him for his valor. To Olrand, however, it simply meant that the Grand King did not think that slaying Olrand was worth the risk, and so all Olrand felt was a hollow sense of defeat.

“I do want to fight him again, but… I guess I still can’t beat him now. You’d probably need one of those people they call heroes to defeat him, otherwise it would be very difficult. Therefore… ah, you’ve also heard of it, right boss? How that great warrior, Gazef Stronoff, died in battle.”

“Ah, yes, I did. The higher-ups are debating hotly about how that’s going to affect the surrounding countries, after all.”

The death of Gazef Stronoff, known as the mightiest warrior of the Re-Estize Kingdom, was a matter of great interest to the soldiers of the Holy Kingdom — particularly the skilled ones.

“Do you know any specifics?”

“I’ve heard some rough details. Apparently, he duelled a magic caster known as the Sorcerer King and was struck down. Frankly speaking, the fact that he would actually challenge a magic caster to a duel is quite hard to take in.”

Olrand agreed as well.

However, the term “magic caster” was quite broad. Divine magic casters could, after using spells which enhanced their physical abilities, end up stronger than a half-baked warrior. In addition, the paladins who were the pride of this nation could use magic too, so to some extent, one could not say they were not magic casters. In that case, he could understand the reasons for the duel.

“...In addition, others say that the Sorcerer King massacred an entire army. Apparently he summoned gigantic goats, or sheep, rather.”

“Well, that’s the first time I’ve heard that. Still, gigantic goats? What a weird magic caster.”

The mention of goats reawakened unhappy memories of Olrand’s defeat. That said, while the rumors said he had summoned goats, they were clearly not ordinary goats.

“Well, it’s also because of that weird magic caster. That’s why I need to do this.”

“...That’s why? I don’t quite get your meaning.”

“This hasn’t changed from when I lost to you, but I’m the sort of person who disregards items that grant flight, spells, and the like. I’ve always thought that all you need to do is beat them with your sword. However, after the Kingdom’s Warrior-Captain-dono — who was stronger than me — lost to those, I began to think that maybe I shouldn’t look down on them.”

“Which means?”

“Which means I need to go on a warrior’s pilgrimage.”

“...Don’t tell me you’re going to challenge those people in our country that you can’t beat?”

“I won’t.”

Some of the opponents which Olrand could not win against were fellow members of the Nine Colors.

The Vice-Captain of the marines, Enrique Belsway, known as “the Blue.”

The Captain of the Paladin Order, Remedios Custodio, known as “the White.”

Pavel Baraja, known as “the Black.”

Ran Tsu An Rin, one of the Mermen who lived in the sea, known as “the Green.”

And then, outside of the Nine Colors, there was the most powerful priest in the nation, Queralt Custodio.

In other words, they were some of the most highly placed people in the land, and challenging them would surely cause great ructions in the country. If it was just a mock battle, then it ought to be all right, so long as it was against a fellow member of the Nine Colors, but an all-out duel would never be allowed.

However, that would not do.

A true clash of blades was completely different from a mock battle. Sometimes, the winner and loser could be completely reversed between them. Many people became much stronger — or weaker — when going from training to a live combat. Naturally, the strong were recognized as such because they showed their power in actual combat. Therefore, one could not consider a warrior pilgrimage complete without fighting a real battle.

“That’s good, then... still, where do you plan to train yourself?”

“I was thinking of visiting the Sorcerous Kingdom you mentioned earlier. It seems there’s powerful undead there.”

The Sorcerous Kingdom of Ainz Ooal Gown.

It would have taken an incredible attention-seeker to actually name a country after themselves, but it was not entirely unthinkable. More to the point, it was a fact that the person who had done so had the power to back it up.

“I’ve heard of it from the merchants who travel between the Kingdom and the Holy Kingdom.”

Thanks to the teachings of the Holy Kingdom’s temples, the common man both hated and despised the undead. Even Pavel was no exception. No, Olrand thought. Pavel did not hate them because they were the enemies of the Holy Kingdom, but because they were his wife’s enemies.

However, he could not bring that up. While he did not lose himself in chatting about his wife as he did with his daughter, he still spoke far too much.

“The Holy Kingdom’s stance is to tacitly acknowledge the existence of the Sorcerous Kingdom, right? They say it’s okay for people of the Holy Kingdom to go over there… right?”

There was no way to hide the fact that the Sorcerous Kingdom, with its armies of the undead, was an intolerable foe of the Holy Kingdom. Many people had urged them to send out troops when they thought of how the people in the Sorcerous Kingdom’s Capital of E-Rantel must be suffering. However, the Holy Kingdom presently faced the threat of the demihumans, and they would not be able to conduct military operations in other countries without first pacifying the hill region.

The feelings of the people aside, the leadership's response to the Sorcerous Kingdom did not escalate beyond half-hearted criticism.

“...The Sorcerous Kingdom, hm. Well, if you apply to the brass, you ought to be able to go over there as a member of the army. They view the Sorcerous Kingdom as a threat second only to the demihumans. It seems they want to ally with the Theocracy against them.”

“Really now. It seems there’ll be a lot of problems due to religious differences, then.”

“Yes, precisely. Well, that aside, if your affiliation doesn’t change, you can receive the country’s aid and you can skip those annoying immigration checks… I think. If you go over, you’ll be a godsend to the people who want to know more about the inner workings of the Sorcerous Kingdom.”

“Well, wouldn’t that be nice. Still, if I did that, I couldn’t just go around picking fights.”

“You… the way you say that so seriously is really headache-inducing.”

“I guess it’d be hard on you if it became an international incident, huh.”

The cold wind blew past them. For a while, Pavel went silent, his expression unchanged, but after that, he began muttering unhappily (as usual).

“I’m going to miss that ugly face of yours.”

Olrand smiled wickedly. It was a ferocious, bestial grin, but he was being uncharacteristically shy. Pavel had not said, “don’t go,” but neither had he said, “go.” He decided to make sure that he would have somewhere to return to.

“Sorry about that… Well, I’ll come back after I become stronger. Want me to train you up at that time?”

“Fancy you saying that.”

As Olrand chuckled, Pavel laughed back at him in turn. Their laughter was every bit as ferocious as two wild beasts growling at each other.

Just then, the bell rang.

It would seem that it was time to change over to the night shift. They had spoken at great length, so they would wrap it up with one more thing. As Olrand thought that, that notion evaporated from his mind as the bell continued to ring.

Pavel, followed closely by Olrand, looked to the hills.

Those bells meant “Demihumans sighted.”

Their visibility was clear up to to over four hundred meters away. In the past, there had once been forests and trees there, but the country had conducted a massive landscaping project as part of the wall’s construction to flatten it out.

However, at the furthest reaches of the expansive plains — where there were hills and other obstructions — they saw sparkles in the darkness and moving black shadows.

“Boss…”

It was impossible for Olrand to discern the true identities of those demihumans at this distance while in the dark. Therefore, he called on the man with the keenest eyesight.

“Yes, they’re demihumans… Snakemen,” Pavel immediately answered.

Snakemen had heads like a cobra and scaly, humanoid bodies, as well as tails. They were demihumans that were considered close relatives to Lizardmen. Their serpentine heads had venomous bites and their spears were coated in powerful toxins. Close combat with them was to be avoided as much as possible.

That said, Olrand and his men were seasoned veterans, and they possessed very high resistance to poisons. While their scales provided some protection, they were not hard enough to deflect metal weapons. They might be skilled with their tails, but one could simply consider them another weapon. In addition, they had the advantage at night due to their ophidian sensory organs, but that was not a problem.

Is leading the charge on them going to be our job? No, by the time they reach here, Boss’s unit would have shot them all to death.

Snakemen despised cold objects, so they did not use metal armor and other such items. As a result, it was a simple task for first-rate archers like Pavel and his men to fill them full of arrows.

“So how many of them are there, Boss?”

Usually, there would be less than twenty of them.

“...Boss?”

Olrand was briefly puzzled by the lack of a response. He looked at Pavel, and saw a look of clear vexation on that typically blank face of his.

“What’s wrong, Boss?”

“...There’s more of them? Could this be — this is bad! I’ve spotted members of other species! Armatts, Ogres, and are those Cavens?”

“What did you say?”

There were all kinds of demihumans in the hill region, but they did not have good relationships with each other. On the contrary, they often fought over territory, and apart from cases where Ogres took Goblins as slaves and cruelly used them, these races very rarely worked with each other.

There had even been cases where some of them had attacked the Holy Kingdom after being driven from their lands.

Then this ought to be the same thing. Because if it was not—

“A big invasion?”

He did not know who had said that. Perhaps the person saying so might have thought he was speaking to himself, but it sounded clear enough to his ears.

“Olrand, I’ve got something to ask you.”

There was tension in Pavel’s voice. No, that was only to be expected.

Race, culture, and religion. Just as how there could be many nations composed of members of the same species, creating a cohesive nation was a very difficult task. It was even more difficult when the species of the members were different. Therefore, uniting the demihuman tribes in the hills was a nigh-impossible task.

If that was what had happened, that would mean the beginning of a battle for the Holy Kingdom’s survival.

After that — Olrand’s body trembled uncontrollably.

Uniting all these races would require obvious power. Among mankind, wisdom and wealth would qualify as a form of strength, but the demihuman races prized power. In other words—

That means there might be a frighteningly powerful enemy out there, is that it?

“Tell me with your warrior’s instincts. Why do you think these guys chose to reveal themselves at a fortress like this — at such a well defended place? One — they’re serving as bait to draw out our forces to thin out our defences. Two—”

“They’re confident of breaking through in a head-on attack. Twenty percent of the Holy Kingdom’s fighting strength is stationed here, and they’re going to crush us like cockroaches.”

Despite feeling Pavel’s keen gaze from beside him, Olrand did not stop talking.

“At the same time, they’re going to use this fortress as a bridgehead. Then, they’re going to crush the morale of the Holy Kingdom and boost their own morale. Is that it?”

“...They might issue a mass mobilization order.”

“Haha! A war like this has only occurred once before in the history of the Holy Kingdom, and now there’s going to be another one like it in our time! What can we say to that!?”

“I’m going to report to the higher-ups. You come with me too.”

“Got it, boss! Oi, you lot! This is going to be one hell of a party! Keep the backup weapons coming!”

If the enemy was an army, they would have to spend a lot of time forming their troops up. This was especially true if they counted numerous races among their number. However, the same applied to the defenders as well. Since they were an army, they would need time to prepare themselves. This held true even on the frontline.

There was a shocking amount of things which needed to be done. There was no more time to idle around.

Olrand ran after Pavel.

♦ ♦ ♦

Part 2

As the enemy troops slowly formed up, Pavel felt a sharp pain in his throat.

The slower the enemy attack, the more forces they could gather to this fortress, and the more time they would have to give the mobilization order. This was the perfect scenario for their commanding officers, but Pavel did not share their opinion.

There were demihumans with intellect that surpassed humanity. Surely the commander of such a vast army was no fool. In that case, he would know that giving their opponent time to prepare was a disadvantageous thing. In addition, it was late at night now, and the coming battle would be to the demihumans’ advantage. It would be the same even if they lit bonfires.

Pavel looked at the enemy lines, four hundred meters away.

While they were organized by species, no consideration seemed to have been given to things like the weapons they wielded, their respective tactics, their various racial characteristics, and so on.

In all likelihood, the demihumans were not marching under the same flag. Otherwise they would have fielded a more logical battle line. Or was this something like an oligarchy, an alliance of demihumans led by a council of equals?

“Can’t quite make it out, Boss. Can you see the enemy commander?”

“...No, I haven’t spotted their leader yet.”

His men had not reported sighting anything like that so far.

However, there had to be a commander. Otherwise, even forming up into units would be very difficult.

“He can’t keep hiding forever. He’ll surely show up on the battlefield.”

Given the nature of demihumans, their leaders were strong, and they would show up to flaunt their strength.

That would be the best time for Pavel to work.

Pavel clutched his bow.

It was a magical composite longbow, infused with enchantments specialized against demihumans. In addition, he also had a Mantle of Shadow, suitable for blending into shadows and conducting ambushes, Boots of Silence, which eliminated the sound of his footsteps, a Vest of Resistance, to improve his resilience against various attacks, a Deflection Ring, to protect him from ranged weapons, and many other such items. These were a sign of how much Pavel’s nation valued him.

“You lot. Prepare to shoot at any time,” he ordered his subordinates, who were hidden beside him as though they had vanished into the night.

If they were humans, they would exchange envoys to read out declarations and pronouncements; that was a characteristic of wars between nobles. However, nobody from the Holy Kingdom who was quartered in this fortress, the generals included, wanted to parley with the demihumans of the hills. At the very most, they would hold talks to deceive them, or something like talks in order to buy time, and once they spotted the enemy commander they would shoot him dead on the spot.

“...You ought to be heading back to your unit now.”

“I’ll do that. Take care, Boss.”

“Ahh, you too.”

A wisp of unease wound through Pavel’s heart as he watched Olrand leave.

Some demihumans possessed lethal special attacks.

For instance, the mystic eyes of the Giant Biclops.

These demihumans had unbalanced faces and a pair of disproportionately massive eyes. One of these Mystic Eyes contained the ability to 「Charm」 their foes. Its victims would unconsciously approach the opposition. Indeed, they would disregard the fact that they were on walls to take the shortest path towards the demihuman who had enthralled them.

Usually, they would be equipped with magic items to improve their resistance to such special abilities, but Olrand had not been furnished with such items. If his luck was bad, he might be taken out in one shot.

He closed his eyes to clear away his unease, and a woman’s figure appeared in Pavel’s mind.

She was one of the Nine Colors, the woman known as the White.

She worries me too, but in a different way. She’s clueless and often gets the people around her in trouble. That’s why Pink has it so hard… why does my daughter want to join her? Wouldn’t it be good enough for her to just normally meet a good man, fall in love with him and then marry him — no!

He shook away the worry for his daughter that swelled in his heart.

At the same time, he looked back at the demihuman lines, to change his mood.

He did not know how many demihumans stood at the foothills, but there were many flags waving there. Those flags were not camouflage; the sole third tier magic caster in this fortress had already verified it from the sky.

In other words, there really were that many combat units gathered here today. Things would not end with a simple staring match.

Pavel began his usual ritual.

He took out a carved wooden doll from his breast pocket, and then kissed it.

This was a figurine his daughter had made when she was six. It was a grotesque doll with four sticks coming out of a ball, made to look like her father. He still clearly remembered the day when he had praised her by saying “This is a really cool monster,” and how she had burst into tears, and how his wife had kicked him.

The doll was worn out because he had touched it countless times, and the carved eyes and mouth were faded away. She had grown much older since that time, so he wanted her to make a figurine that looked more like him. But perhaps she did not know his heart, because she showed no signs of wanting to remake it.

It was probably because of his long tours of duty stationed here, but he rarely had the chance to see his wife and daughter. He felt himself drawing further and further away from her every day. In the past she would have hugged him immediately, but at some point, she no longer hugged him after he returned home.

She’s grown independent of her father, his wife had smiled, but this was a big thing to Pavel.

If I could take two month’s leave, I’d like to go camping as a family, like we used to.

His daughter would listen with rapt attention whenever he taught her his ranger knowledge. That was what he was aiming for. That said, he knew it would probably not work out.

He put the doll back into his pocket.

His daughter was rarely home due to her aim of becoming a paladin. When Pavel returned to his home after a long absence, his daughter was often away.

It would be best if she married a neighbor after all… no, someone who lived a little close by, or no, someone who stayed in the vicinity.

A paladin’s way of life was the least suitable for his daughter. He had been observing her all this time, so he was sure of it.

His daughter had chosen this path because she admired how her mother looked as a paladin. However, that was not enough to be a paladin.

Only a knight who physically expressed the justice they believed in could be called a paladin.

Therefore, although he did not say it — largely because his wife was very scary — to him, paladins were essentially zealots.

I wonder if my girl knows that…. While I don’t want her to know...

“—That really is an incredible number out there.”

His adjutant muttered to himself under his breath, which brought Pavel to his senses.

“Ahhh, that’s right. Still, there’s no need to be scared. All you need to do is support me.”

In addition to his adjutant, the mood from the men around him relaxed somewhat.

That’s right, that’s it. Tension is the archenemy of sniping.

And just as Pavel broke his own blank face — although he did not realize it — with a thin smile, there was movement in the enemy lines.

A lone demihuman slowly stepped forward.

Despite the many demihumans around him, he was unescorted. Did he not need an escort, or was he full of arrogance, or perhaps he was a messenger whose death would not be missed?

“Should we shoot him?”

“Not for now. But move to a place where it’ll be easy to shoot and then wait for my order.”

After quietly giving his orders, his men sped away in droves, like lengthening shadows.

Was he the enemy general, or just a simple messenger? Pavel studied him carefully to find out.

That demihuman… what species does he belong to? Doesn’t feel like I’ve seen him before… and what’s with those clothes? Is it a tribal outfit? Is that mask something like that too?

He was definitely not human. There was a tail coming from behind his waist.

The problem was the demihuman’s clothes. One could think of it as a tribal costume, and indeed, it felt like it might have been something like that. However, even at this distance, one could tell that the clothing was of excellent make, even when compared to that of humans.

Highly civilized demihumans are very troublesome...

It was not just Pavel. All the soldiers waiting on the walls gulped as they watched every move the demihuman made. Amidst the oppressive mood in the air, the demihuman approached to within fifty meters of his location.

“That’s far enough! Any further and you’ll be encroaching on the Holy Kingdom’s territory! This is no place for you demihumans! Leave at once!”

The voice was loud enough that even Pavel, who was some distance away, felt it was loud. It came from the man in command of the fortress, one of just five generals in the Holy Kingdom. He imagined he could feel the voice of the man in unadorned, battle-scarred armor resonating in his gut.

The reason why he only had one staff officer by his side was probably because he did not intend to get the others caught up in it if the enemy launched an attack. In their place were many troops with tower shields hidden behind them, ready to rush out if anything happened.

In contrast, the demihuman’s voice was gentle and pleasing to the ear. It seemed to worm its way into every man’s heart. Even at this distance, it still reached Pavel’s ears.

“That we already know. Now then — may I know who you are?”

“I’m — I’m the general in charge of this fortress! Who are you!?”

There was no need to tell the opposition that, Pavel frowned, but he already knew that the general was not a shrewd man. Therefore, he should have regarded this outcome as inevitable.

“I see, I see. Since you have given your name, I fear it might be rude not to respond in kind. Greetings, ladies and gentlemen of the Holy Kingdom. My name is Jaldabaoth.”

“Could it be!?”

The man who shouted was the staff officer near the general.

“The archfiend Jaldabaoth! Are you the demon who led an army of demons in that disturbance in the Kingdom’s Royal Capital!?”

“Ohh! I am honored that you know my name. Indeed, I was the architect of that magnificent feast in the Re-Estize Kingdom. However… the title of Archfiend is quite saddening… yes, I was wondering if you could address me as the Demon Emperor Jaldabaoth.”

Pavel tasted that phrase, “Demon Emperor Jaldabaoth.”

It was a truly arrogant title, but given the many demihumans it led, and after thinking back on what he had heard about the disturbance in the Royal Capital, that title might be well-deserved.

“Damn you! Are you laying your designs on us after what you did to the Kingdom!?”

“No, that is not quite right. It is because I met a fearsome warrior in the Kingdom—”

Jaldabaoth shrugged boredly. There was an indescribable sense of style to that movement, and it made Pavel imagine he was looking at a human noble for a moment.

“—Well, do permit me to keep that knowledge to myself.”

“Then what business do you have here? Why did you lead these demihumans to this place?”

“I have come here to turn this country into a living hell. I wish to make this country one which echoes with cries, curses, and screams everlasting. However, making sport of millions of human beings individually is impossible, and so I have brought them along. In my place, they will plunge you pitiful humans shoulder-deep into a morass of despair, in order to draw wails of regret and suffering from you all.”

Jaldabaoth said so very happily.

At this point, Pavel learned the meaning of evil. What the holy men shouted about the “wicked demihumans” was nothing more than propaganda to raise fighting spirit. It was practically sleeptalking. From a detached point of view, demihuman invasions were nothing more than going to the farm to feed themselves.

Terror filled Pavel’s body. At the same time, he made up his mind.

He would not allow that demon to set foot upon the Holy Kingdom’s land, where his wife and daughter were.

He tightened his grip on the bow in his hand.

If Jaldabaoth’s words were intended to intimidate them, then they had been a complete failure. Humans were not cowardly and weak creatures. They would let him taste the foolishness of underestimating humanity with their vicious counterattack.

The people here possessed the iron will to defend the Holy Kingdom, and even if it had rusted a little in the past few years, they were still fiercely devoted to their home nation.

“—Do you think we’d let you do something like that!? Listen now, Jaldabaoth the fool!” the general barked.

Indeed. He was barking.

“This is the first line of the Holy Kingdom’s defense! It is also the last line of its defense! Beyond us lies the peace of the Holy Kingdom’s people! Did you think we would let you trample it as you wish!?”

The nearby soldiers shouted, “Uoooohhhh!” in response to the general’s bellowing. In that moment, their fighting spirit flared up. Pavel would have cried out as well if he were not hiding himself, and perhaps his subordinates, whose bodies trembled faintly, felt the same way.

However, a round of out-of-place applause threw a damper on that. After clapping for a while, the demon spoke up.

“Watchdogs which guard the cradle, hm? I cannot say I disapprove. It is very important to protect things. —Yes, I approve very much. That being the case, I shall give the people I capture here the finest possible reception.”

The way he laughed as he spoke made him sound like he was enjoying himself.

Jaldabaoth did not speak particularly loudly. Therefore, it would have been understandable if his voice did not carry over to where Pavel was. Even so, the words reached him with a mysterious clarity, as though they were coming from behind himself.

—Don’t worry about it, that might be the work of magic.

Spells and magic items which amplified sound existed, and it was very likely that Jaldabaoth was using those. However, he could not escape the unpleasant feeling which seemed to adhere to his back.

“I will not accept surrender or anything of the sort. Entertain me to the best of your ability. Now then — let us begin.”

Pavel gave his subordinates the order to shoot.

There was no need to wait for the General’s commands. They were permitted a degree of independence, because opportunities to snipe the enemy commander were not readily available. Waiting for approval from their superior might result in them missing their chance.

Pavel stood up.

The men around him followed suit.

It took only a moment to lock onto his target. A distance of fifty meters was essentially point blank range to Pavel. He drew his bow, filled with the intent to kill — and Pavel felt Jaldabaoth’s eyes meet his through the mask.

We won’t give you the time to flee or defend yourself. If you want to blame anything, blame your own arrogance for coming out onto the frontlines alone!

“—Loose!”

Fifty one arrows flew out in time with Pavel’s voice.

Their enchanted bows discharged magical arrows.

The flaming arrows left red lines hanging in the air, blue trails lingered behind the ice arrows, the lightning arrows’ path was marked in yellow, green streaks followed in the wake of the acid arrows, and Pavel’s own holy arrow traced a white trajectory as they all soared through the void.

The arrows loosed from the fully-drawn bows travelled flat paths as they streaked through the air, each one striking Jaldabaoth’s body without deviating in the slightest.

Pavel’s shots were exceptionally potent, and after being enhanced with his martial arts and his skills, each of them possessed power comparable to a mighty downward slash from a heavy trooper. If he were hit by this, even a man in full plate would be knocked back and sent rolling over the ground.

However — Jaldabaoth did not move in the slightest even after taking fifty one arrows.

And then, something happened which made him doubt his eyes.

The arrows which should have punched through his body fell to the ground.

What!? Is he defended against projectiles!?

Pavel quickly nocked his second arrow as he thought about how Jaldabaoth had defended against those arrow shots.

Some monsters were able to nullify attacks through their special qualities. For instance, lycanthropes and the like were nigh-invulnerable if one did not use silver weapons against them.

He considered that Jaldabaoth might have a similar ability. In that case, what sort of attack could breach Jaldabaoth’s defenses?

The arrow he had launched just now was made of steel, and it was enchanted with holy power that was especially effective against those of evil alignment. While it was said that demons could not defend against it, there was no denying that Jaldabaoth had proven immune to it. In that case, it would be best to use other arrows to learn more about the opposition, tearing down his veil of mystery to chart a course for victory.

Pavel readied a silver arrow next. It too was imbued with righteous power.

“...Now then, do permit me to make a move of my own. It is a trifling present, but I would be delighted if you would accept it. This is a tenth tier spell: 「Meteor Fall」.”

Pavel sensed something from above him, approaching with unavoidable speed. Looking up, he saw a mass of light.

It was a gigantic heated rock — no, it was something bigger than that.

Light gradually filled his vision, and for a moment he glimpsed the forms of his wife and daughter amidst the light.

He knew it was an illusion. His daughter was old enough that she could choose her own path in life. Even so, the daughter he saw was still young, and his wife who held her still looked very young.

No, if I don’t say she’s still young now, she’ll probably kill me—

♦ ♦ ♦

The falling meteor slashed through the sky and hit the wall, where it burst into an explosion. A thunderous roar echoed all around. The massive shockwave flattened everything it touched and shattered the wall.

As the sand and dirt thrown up by the shockwave of the explosion begin falling back to earth, the dust slowly began to settle.

What it revealed was the remains of the broken wall, blasted to smithereens, and drifting smoke.

After looking at the devastated fortifications, there was no need to think about what had happened to the soldiers stationed there.

Humans could not possibly survive such conditions.

Of course, Demiurge knew that some humans could endure such things. For instance, there were the fools who had stepped into the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick, the holy land created by the Supreme Beings. However, he had done thorough research beforehand, and he had verified that no such humans existed here.

“Now then, this ought to be enough for preparations.”

Demiurge dusted off his suit with his hands. He had not been showered with sand or dirt, but the dust from the blast had reached him, so there was a slight earthy scent clinging to him. No — he would have done so even if that had not been the case. After all, this was a valuable item from the great being who had made him.

Of course, Demiurge had many other clothes besides this set, but that did not mean that he could treat it carelessly because of that.

As he thought of his mighty creator, he smiled behind his mask, and then looked out at the pitiful humans.

If he followed up with an attack, the enemy’s confusion would become that much more apparent, and at that point, the demihuman assault would cause a complete rout. However, he had not used that spell just now for that purpose.

Demiurge could only cast a very small number of spells; there was only one other tenth tier spell available to him. His true power lay in his skills, and while he had used that spell just now to conserve his strength, the scene before his eyes was sufficiently tragic as it was.

There was no sign of a counterattack. It would seem they were desperately trying to collect information and regroup.

Their commander is not dead… and their confusion doesn’t seem because they’re suspicious of us… are they really all right?

Demiurge turned his back to the humans, walking back to the formation of his slaves.

He was not even on guard against the possibility of being attacked from behind.

He could afford to be this lax because of all the information he had gathered.

Demiurge was very strong.

Indeed, he might be ranked lowly among the Floor Guardians, but he was confident of victory in battle. That was because he knew that battles were fought because one was confident of winning them. That was to say, one should not choose to fight if one was unable to win, unless otherwise ordered.

There was only one person that Demiurge could not defeat — in other words, there was only one opponent against whom Demiurge could not prepare enough to assure his own victory.

That person possessed intellect which surpassed his, schemes which beggared the imagination, a view of the world which seemed to extend out unto eternity, the ultimate pinnacle who held everything in the palm of his hand.

He was the supreme ruler of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick — Ainz Ooal Gown.

That Supreme Being was the one to whom Demiurge owed his loyalty.

Producing a great deal of undead was part of his plan. Once that scheme takes effect, nobody will be able to harm Ainz-sama. How fearsome he is. It seems the others do not yet realise how joyful it is to be ruled by such a Supreme Being—

There was a thud. This was the first time something had happened which Demiurge had not expected. He turned to look at the source of the sound.

It would seem someone had jumped down from the wall. The man in question slowly rose to his feet.

“The, the boss is dead. He, he was the man I wanted to defeat!”

The man drew his swords with both hands as he said so.

Demiurge evaluated the man from his appearance. He reached an answer immediately.

Threat Level — E (Worm).

Error Probability — E (None at all).

Importance — E (Guinea pig).

In other words, he was nothing but trash. Still, he was one of the Nine Colors — while not all of them were impressive, he thought that it would be good to capture him and run all sorts of experiments on him.

"Uooooooooh!"

The screaming man ran over to him.

Slow. So slow. If this is the extent of his speed, should he not have used his brain more? For instance using 「Silence」 to approach quietly and close the gap between us...

This was a distance his comrades would have been able to close in an instant. The man — slowly — ran over to him.

According to the information Demiurge had collected, this man of inferior ability could apparently use a special attack that was several times more powerful than normal in exchange for breaking his weapons. Therefore, he had a sword in each hand, and several more swords like it at his waist.

How should I kill him? If I finish him off as cleanly as possible, then when I take him back I can — ah, he’s finally arrived.

After ensuring that he would not be splashed by the man’s spraying blood, Demiurge gave an order.

“『...Stab yourself in the throat with your swords.』”

There was a choked gurgle.

A look of bafflement appeared in the eyes of the man who had just pierced his own throat with the blades he held. His eyes clouded over like marbles as he collapsed to the ground.

Pained cries rose from the wall.

Demiurge turned, walked over to the man’s side, and picked him up by the collar with a single hooked index finger before returning to his formation.

After he returned to his lines, the representatives of the various tribes — not their leaders — gathered before him.

Demiurge had mentally divided the demihumans into two groups.

One kind craved fresh blood and viewed humans as food. They would obey the strong, and they gladly obeyed Demiurge’s commands. The other kind were those who had been made to kneel before the terror of Demiurge, and they obeyed him due to negative inducements like fear.

Demiurge had selected a group of the latter kind.

“You took your time in assembling.”

Saying so, he seized the shoulder of a random demihuman he had selected from the group. Its species was known as Zerns. After doing so, he ripped the skin from its shoulder.

While Demiurge was among the weaker Floor Guardians, he could still do that much.

The demihuman whose skin — and some of its flesh — had been ripped off collapsed to the ground in intense agony, shrieking wordlessly.

“Now then, begin the attack. Take care not to sustain too many losses. The main course begins after we get past this wall,” Demiurge said in a gentle tone.

His kindness was genuine when it was directed to his fellow denizens of Nazarick. He was a very gentle person when it came to his friends. However, to everyone else, his kindness was merely the care he gave to his tools.

After receiving his orders, the demihumans ran back to their various tribes. The demihuman rolling around on the ground was no exception.

The message they bore was that those who obeyed Demiurge’s orders and achieved good results would meet a happy fate. Naturally, they also carried the message that achieving the opposite results meant that their future would be anything but happy.

Demiurge smiled gently as he watched the receding backs of the beastmen.

“—Then, let us begin the next step of our plan. —Demons.”

Demiurge activated one of his skills and summoned a vast quantity of the demons he intended to use as sacrificial pawns.

While these demons were extremely weak compared to Demiurge, summoning stronger demons would mean he could not summon as many. The important thing in this operation was to spread the word that the Holy Kingdom’s army had been assaulted by demons, which meant that quantity was the priority here.

“Listen carefully now. Support the demihumans in their efforts. Also, limit your pursuit of the humans. Do not do something as foolish as not allowing a single one to flee the fortress.”

The low ranked demons nodded, and soared into the sky as one.

While summoned monsters were supposed to know a portion of what their summoner knew, said information was generally quite vague.. It would be best to regard it as the ability to tell friend from foe. Therefore, it was important to give verbal commands to summoned creatures.

Now then… it would be good if the ball landed on target.

Demiurge’s perspicacious mind pondered all manner of situations, and after computing dozens of eventualities, he made the appropriate corrections to achieve his aim. Slight deviations were within his predictions. However, there were times when utter fools would lead to situations developing beyond their expectations.

Surely someone with Ainz-sama’s intellect could even predict the actions of fools… I’m still a long way off. Come to think of it, it would be good if I could share this with Ainz-sama...

As he thought that, Demiurge’s heart raced unbidden. He had spent a great deal of time preparing this stage; if he could not even share it with his supreme master, what would Demiurge do?

Ladies and gentlemen of the Holy Kingdom, I have a sincere wish. Please allow Ainz-sama to enjoy himself with your suffering forms. … Although, how will Ainz-sama adjust my plans for a better outcome?

Like a student waiting for a respected teacher to dispense instruction, Demiurge smiled as his heart filled with the fires of anticipation and excitement.

Oh, to learn from Ainz-sama’s actions, progress towards a better self, and further deepen my loyalty. How wonderful it is!

To Demiurge, who had been born to serve the Supreme Beings, nothing was more delightful than giving his all for his master.

“Ahhh, this is truly marvellous…”

Part 3

The news of a demihuman alliance — one that comprised a massive army — crushing the strongest central fortress and its vast quantities of soldiers, then subsequently crossing the wall, had already begun spreading throughout the Holy Kingdom.

The leader of the demihuman alliance was called the Demon Emperor Jaldabaoth.

He was a demon who had caused great havoc in the Kingdom, and he had used powerful magic to shred the wall like tissue paper.

The demihuman alliance was made up of eighteen species, and their numbers were estimated in excess of one hundred thousand. This army of demihumans was now focused on destroying the walls and fortifications, and their advance had ground to a halt.

After learning this, the leader of the Holy Kingdom — the Holy Queen — issued a general mobilization order to the entire nation.

Since the Holy Kingdom’s territory was stretched around the northern and southern edges of a central bay, any mobilized forces would naturally be formed into two armies — the Northern Holy Kingdom Army and the Southern Holy Kingdom Army.

The armies each moved towards their own important locations — the city of Kalinsha in the north, and the city of Debonei in the south — where they spied on the enemy’s movements for several days.

The reports they received from the troops observing the wall made the situation even more pressing.

—The demihuman alliance, in all its strength, was moving west—

—They would reach the northern fortress city of Kalinsha in a few days—

“Really now? So this place is going to become a battlefield after all…”

The speaker was the Holy Queen, Calca Bessarez.

Due to her low place in the order of succession — only males had inherited the Holy Kingdom until now — she should never have taken the position of Holy Queen. However, due to two qualities she had, the crown had eventually been placed upon her brow.

The first was her beautiful looks. Her face was as beautiful as a freshly-bloomed flower, filled with cuteness and dignity, and it was praised as “the treasure of Roble,” while her radiant, vibrant long hair was like threads of spun gold. Since it resembled an angel’s halo, many who saw her gentle smile went on to describe her as a saint.

The other quality was her excellence as a divine magic caster. She was a genius who could use fourth tier spells at the tender age of fifteen, and she had ascended to the throne with the firm backing of the previous Holy King and the temples.

Almost ten years had passed since then, while certain voices disapproved of her excessive kindness, she had not made any mistakes which could be considered critical and thus she had ruled the Holy Kingdom to this day. However, this rule was not solid, and embers smoldered out of sight.

“I understand your sadness, Calca-sama, but the people who live in Kalinsha do so because they have prepared themselves for a day like this. In the past, there was also... ahem, that battle, where this city was the heart of the fighting. That’s why the walls here are even taller and sturdier than anywhere else.”

The person trying to console her was a woman with brown hair.

While she was as beautiful as the Holy Queen, her eyes contained a cold, razor-sharp look, like the edge of a blade. She was dressed in a suit of silvery full plate armor and a surcoat. These were the traditional vestments of the Paladin Order’s Captain, an ancient article of magical masterwork. The most important thing was the sword at her waist, whose name was known to everyone in the Holy Kingdom.

It was renowned as one of the four Holy Swords, the holy sword Safalrisia.

One of the Thirteen Heroes, known as Black Knight, was said to have carried four swords — the evil blade Hyumilis, the demonic blade Kilineyram, the blade of rot Crocdabal, and the fatal blade Sfeiz. This was one of the four swords which existed as a counterpart to them. Incidentally, the other three holy swords were known as the sword of law, the sword of justice, and the sword of life.

Wielding a powerful sword often led to one becoming drunk on its power and neglecting the fundamentals of swordsmanship. Therefore, the fact that she carried that sword which she would normally never carry was a sign of her unshakable determination to join the upcoming battle, and to win it.

Her name was Remedios Custodio.

She was a close friend of Calca, and as the strongest Captain of the order in history, a feat founded upon her fighting prowess. She was “White” of the Nine Colors.

“Yup, yup. And we’ve also sent all the noncombatants off to take shelter so there won’t be casualties among them. Rather, don’t you think the more pressing problem after the war will be the expenses incurred during the fighting?”

The person going ufufufufu in an indecent way was a woman.

While the shape of her eyes and mouth varied slightly, her face still bore a close resemblance to that of Remedios. However, those faint differences were enough to change the impression others had of her. She always looked like she was plotting something — or in less polite terms, that she was surrounded by a sinister air.

She was Remedios’s sister, younger than her by two years, Queralt Custodio.

She was the high priestess of the temples, and leader of the priesthood.

It was public knowledge that she could use divine magic of the fourth tier.

However, that was but a deception; those close to her knew that she could cast fifth tier spells.

Incidentally, she was not one of the Nine Colors. While the temples were under the Holy Queen, it was government policy not to bestow a Color title on one of their number in order to avoid problems with the balance of power.

These sisters were known as the genius Custodio sisters, the twin wings of the Holy Queen.

Until now, many nobles had their doubts about Calca’s ascension to the throne as a female, and they wondered if she had done something with or to the sisters. Therefore, they often spoke ill of all three of them at the same time.

While many rumors about them had been cleared up, one particular piece of gossip remained. All three of them were unmarried — without so much as a male lover — and so it was said that their relationship was anything but ordinary. However much Calca denied it, she could not shake herself free of that rumor, and it was a major source of frustration for her.

“Just hearing that gives me a headache. It’s pretty bad that we won’t stand to gain anything even if we win.”

“Still, they say that the demihumans this time round are outfitted pretty well. Why not sell their gear?”

“That’s right — you know I can’t approve of that, nee-sama. Let’s say we wanted to sell their armor — where would we sell it? You haven’t thought about that, have you? We can only sell them overseas, but demihuman armor isn’t going to command anything but bargain basement prices. Besides, we ought to avoid strengthening other countries’ arsenals until the destroyed wall is rebuilt. In particular, I hope they don’t fall into the hands of the Sorcerous Kingdom.”

“Huh? You don’t like the Sorcerous Kingdom? I’ve never heard you say that in court, though.”

“No priest would like them. You’re the same way too, right, Calca-sama?”

Calca pondered the matter. As part of the clergy and the Holy Queen, she disliked them. However, as a head of state—

“—A king’s duty is to love his nation, love his people, and grant them peace. As long as he does that, it should be fine, right?”

The sisters looked at each other in front of Calca.

“Love? No way. Could an undead being ever think like that?”

“I agree with nee-sama. The undead — I don’t think they could love like you do, Calca-sama.”

“The two of you are harsh. Still, you can’t just badmouth people without even seeing them, right?”

The puzzled looks on their faces looked very similar. Calca mused that they were siblings after all, and after quelling the smile on her face, her voice turned serious.

“What did your adjutants say? Queralt, tell me our plan for dealing with Jaldabaoth.”

The Holy Queen did not take part in strategy meetings. Instead, she went around the soldiers to boost their morale. While the Holy Kingdom’s troops were better trained than those of other nations, they were ultimately conscripts. It was important to motivate them.

“Yes. We’re already discussing how to deal with situations where the demihumans encircle this city, bypass it, advance to the south, split up to accomplish different objectives, and so on.”

It was times like these that reaffirmed her belief that the sisters were similar, but not alike. If she had asked the elder sister that question, the answer she would get would make her want to grab her head in frustration.

“I see… then, which possibility do you think is the most likely?”

“Given the invasion path of the demihumans so far, it’s most likely that they will choose to encircle this city. However, there is a problem with that.”

“Mm, yes.”

“What do you mean?”

Remedios had not participated in the meetings either, given that she was Calca’s bodyguard. However, the fact that she had not grasped the answer which the Holy Queen had instantly realized was due to another problem.

“...Nee-sama. I’m talking about the demon who wrought havoc in the Kingdom, Jaldabaoth. While there’s no telling how smart he is, demons are skilled at schemes and trickery. He might adopt a plan we did not foresee.”

“I see… the adjutants who have to handle strategy and planning sure have it tough…”

While there was much she wanted to say to the leader of the Paladin Order, Calca resisted the urge to do so

“...This is quite vexing. Then, if the demihumans encircle this city, what will happen after that? While food supplies are ample, fighting a defensive siege is going to wreak horrors on morale. Have you considered that as well?”

“Yes. Normally, all we would have to do is wait for reinforcements from the south to arrive, but we have reports saying that Jaldabaoth used a mysterious power to destroy the wall in a single blow. As long as that tremendous factor of uncertainty in play…”

The three of them frowned as one.

Anyone would be upset when they thought of what had happened to the wall, but Calca knew what was going on.

Remedios was simply imitating what the other two had done.

Remedios did not like to think, and she was a very stubborn person. That was a flaw, but it was also the reason that she could embody absolute justice.

The nature of justice was difficult to contemplate. For instance, imagine if there were two children, one human and one demihuman. Being pure and innocent, they became friends. However, if the demihuman child was discovered by adults, he would be locked up, and the human child would plead for his life. However, if they let the demihuman child go, he might grow up to become a threat to humanity. Was killing the demihuman child just or unjust? This was not a question that could be easily answered.

Calca would have spared him without any hesitation.

Remedios, however, would kill him without any doubts. In addition, she would insist that she was righteous, and not feel a shred of guilt about it. In her heart, anything she did for the sake of the nation and people was acceptable.

When she took the throne of the Holy Queen, Calca had declared to her two close friends, “I will grant happiness to the smallfolk, and make a country where nobody will cry.” In response, she had said, “I will support you and uphold your just cause.” With that pledge in her heart, she was more forthright than anyone else, her heart filled with conviction, and the light in her eyes was like that of a fanatic.

Someone like that was clearly dangerous, yet Calca did not distance herself from her friend. The righteous impulses of loving others, loving peace, hating evil, and the desire to aid the weak were all things she ought to welcome.

And it was because of that nature of hers that what she thought and what she did were the same. Because she did not think about her words, everything she said came from her heart.

Any organization — particularly those that had stood for a long time — would become sluggish due to worries and cares. In addition, their original purity of purpose would tarnish and grow dim.

Since power rested in the hand of one person, it was only natural that power struggles would take place. Even if a victor was decided, the battle against suspicion, jealousy, and fear would continue, until one side eventually perished.

Calca had been freed from this curse halfway though. That was because she had attained magical power that ranked highly even when compared to the past generations of Holy Kings. Others had lauded her for it, and her heart was at ease. Therefore, Calca could put aside her mental preparations to take the throne of the Holy Queen, but her brothers did not feel the same way.

There was only one elder brother among her relatives whom she could trust: Caspond.

Since she lived like this all this time, Remedios was a spiritual oasis for Calca.

“Umu. Such unbelievable power makes me think of the might of the Demon Gods from the stories.”

“Nee-sama, even the Demon Gods weren’t this powerful. For all we know, Jaldabaoth might be a being superior to the Demon Gods.”

“...What a pain. Then how shall we beat him?”

“What are you worrying about, Calca-sama! They say he was defeated by the adamantite ranked adventurers of the Kingdom. Don’t you think we could do the same too?”

“...That is true. If adventurers comparable to us could do it… but the problem now lies in whether or not Jaldabaoth can repeatedly use that power which brought down the wall.”

“On that note, the adjutants feel that given the wall was only struck once, he ought to have problems using it in succession.”

“That’s understandable. If he could use it repeatedly, then he could have just done so. He didn’t because he could only attack once.”

Calca agreed with Remedios’s opinion. If there was a way to do it, there was no reason not to repeatedly use that attack.

It was the same with Calca. She lightly stroked the crown she wore. It was a magic item that was the binding focus for the grand ritual spell that had been passed down through the Holy Kingdom, the 「Last Holy War」.

“...Well, we can conscript high ranking adventurers, the kind who are used to defeating monsters and the like, as part of mobilizing our people. If we muster up our full fighting power, Jaldabaoth’s hardly an unbeatable foe. The fact is, he’s already been defeated once before.”

The Adventurer’s Guild had strongly protested the conscription of adventurers into the army, but Calca had not revoked her order. It was only to be expected — this was a matter of national importance, and splitting their strength was foolish in the extreme. In addition, the Adventurer’s Guild was hardly as powerful as the Holy Kingdom itself, so forcing them to obey was a simple task.

“That’s true. Though I guess we failed in that we didn’t gain detailed intelligence about Jaldabaoth’s activities in the Kingdom.”

“I apologize for that.”

“No, I didn’t mean that, Queralt. You’re not at fault. The blame lies with me, since I didn’t pay attention to news about other countries.”

“Certainly not, Calca-sama. It’s definitely Queralt’s fault.”

“Nee-sama…”

“Well, it’s certainly not my fault. I did my job by protecting Calca-sama and clearing away monsters! I didn’t mess up in my job. That’s what they call making appropriate use of talent!”

Remedios puffed up her chest and hmphed in triumph.

She was correct to say so. That said, it still bothered her.

“...Could it be that Jaldabaoth was behind those incidents where all the people from several villages went missing?”

“That might be the case…”

Some time ago, the residents of quite a few villages had all gone missing. In the end, they had not managed to collect any information pointing to a culprit, but it was possible that Jaldabaoth was pulling the strings behind the scenes.

“In that case, we need to sort this out before we defeat Jaldabaoth. Speaking of which, if only the Kingdom had properly finished him off, we wouldn’t have had trouble like this… did Gazef Stronoff fight him?”

Queralt looked at Calca with a puzzled look on her face.

Her eyes seemed to be asking, Didn’t you tell Nee-sama about it? Therefore, Calca gave her an answer which laid those doubts to rest, and then she smiled tiredly.

Translated, it meant, Of course I told her. I told her about how Jaldabaoth attacked the Royal Capital, how the adventurers defeated Jaldabaoth, the other demons that appeared, and how the Warrior-Captain defeated them all. I told her everything… so it must have been squeezed out by other things and gone in one ear and out the other.

“...I really feel sorry for Nee-sama’s Vice-Captains.”

“Hm? Why are you talking about them all of a sudden?”

Queralt did not answer that question, instead curling a lock of hair around her finger.

Since Remedios did not do any thinking, then there had to be someone to cover her ass. That would be them.

She could keenly appreciate the suffering they went through. However, Remedios’s innocence — or stupidity, if one were not inclined to be polite — also had a healing effect on the soul, so the positives and negatives cancelled each other out.

“...Hah. I only know the rough details, but apparently, he fought with another demon, which was covered in scales.”

“Really now. Well, if he had defeated Jaldabaoth, things wouldn’t have ended up like this. Or don’t tell me those adamantite ranked adventurers are stronger than him?”

“I’m not too sure about that, but I think that might be the case.”

Remedios frowned in distaste.

She was probably unhappy because someone whose strength she had acknowledged was being slighted by someone else.

“Well, all he knows is how to use a sword. If he had anti-demon attacks like we do, things would probably have been different.

In pure fighting power, paladins were a notch below warriors. However, that was not the case when fighting evil beings. Remedios was right, but Queralt still sighed quietly.

Just then, Calca imagined that she had heard the sound of bells.

Remedios immediately sprang into action. At times like this, she was still the first to act.

She flung open the windows.

The early autumn air flowed in, and the air warmed by their three bodies flowed out.

The bracing, cool air brought with it the sound of ringing bells. That was proof that what she had heard earlier was not a ghost sound caused by her ears ringing. No, it would have been much better if she had just misheard things.

At the same time, she heard the sound of several footsteps from the hallway.

“Calca-sama, please stand behind me.”

Remedios quickly drew the holy sword Safalrisia and moved up, putting herself between Calca and the door.

The door opened with a pon.

“Your Majesty!”

She recognized the first man to enter the room as he shouted at the top of his voice — he was the chief of staff.

“What happened? Why are you in such a rush?”

Remedios’s voice carried a hint of rebuke, and the chief of staff replied in a clearly disconcerted tone.

“There was no time to slowly walk over! Your Majesty! It’s Jaldabaoth! Jaldabaoth’s appeared inside the city! He’s begun destroying the city with many demons in tow! Also, the demihumans have made their move! It looks like they’re advancing on this place!”

“What did you say!?”

“We’ve sighted the demihuman army in the vicinity. We don’t know how they deceived our sentries, but we were fed false information! The fighting’s going to start any moment now!”

While the sudden excess of information confused her, that lasted for only a second. Calca immediately resumed her queenly demeanor and gave orders.

“While this is a great departure from our plans, we will begin combat with Jaldabaoth now. While we stall him, prepare to engage the demihuman army. Convey my orders to the adventurers!”

As she heard her subordinate’s words, the doubts in Calca’s heart flooded back again.

Had she underestimated Jaldabaoth?

Of course, she had no intention of underestimating the demon who could easily destroy the wall. But was the feeling that she could beat him a mistake in itself? Would it not have been better to fall back until they had finished learning about their enemy?

No. Calca waved away the budding weakness in her heart.

If they did not fight now, then when would they fight? While it was important to know the enemy, now was the only chance they had to strike with all their might. After this, the attrition of battle would deplete their resources, and it would become more and more difficult to muster the power they could command now.

In addition, continuously retreating until they had completed their intelligence-gathering operations was essentially permitting their country to be trampled underfoot.

If that were the case, an unimaginable number of her citizens would end up suffering.

“...I will let the smallfolk live their days in happiness, and make this a country where nobody will be hurt.”

“Indeed, Calca-sama!”

All smiles, Remedios followed up on Calca’s self-directed mutterings.

However, those were words she had spoken in the past, before she knew the truth of the world. Things being what they were now, it seemed a nigh-impossible aim to achieve.

“Hmph! He’s gotten cocky now that he’s crossed the wall, but to think he didn’t bring his demihuman army with him!” Remedios fumed angrily.

Was it really like that? No, it ought to have been that way. Yet, she could not peel away the undeniable sense that something was wrong which coiled around her heart.

“...Don’t lower your guard, okay? Is this the way you ought to be treating an opponent of such power?”

“Of course, Calca-sama! I don’t intend to be careless at all! With this holy sword, I shall relieve the demon of his head and present it to you!”

No good. I can’t calm her down any more.

That was what Calca thought, but she was not worried about her. That was because Remedios was a different person when she stepped onto the battlefield.

“Ahh~ there’s no need to bother with the head, but your loyalty makes me very happy. In that case, regarding the plan to defeat Jaldabaoth… can you buy us some time?”

“But of course. Your servant has already dispatched an advance force to carry out our plans.”

At that moment, Calca felt a dull ache in her heart. That was because carrying out that order was actually sending them out to die. The soldiers would be going out to fight Jaldabaoth, despite having no chance of victory.

One of her duties as a monarch was to trade the lives of the few for the survival of the many. Therefore, she could not weep or wail here. The soldiers were giving their lives for her, so she would need to put on a show to convince them that this was a glorious assignment.

She would have to play the part of the supreme queen, the Holy Queen who was respected above all others.

“In that case, let’s head out!”

The ringing clap of her hands was the signal for everyone to make their move.

Part 4

Remedios gripped her holy sword and slashed a demon — her Vice-Captains had told her its name, but she had completely forgotten it — in half. Imbued with holy power, the blade could inflict grievous wounds upon evil beings, and it was doing so to great effect. She had cut down the demons rampaging through the city one after the other. The fallen demons vanished as thick white smoke steamed from their wounds. Within seconds, there was no trace that the demons had ever been there.

However, the signs of how the demons had ravaged the city remained.

“How could this be!?”

She looked at a fallen soldier — not one of the vanguard troopers, but a local patrolman — and Remedios bellowed in rage.

His leather armor had been cleanly severed, and the hands clutching his abdomen were stained a deep red. She could even see the pink of his innards. His face was well past the point of paleness, now a bloodless white.

While she had almost no medical knowledge, her own experiences supplied enough information for her to make a judgement. There was no time to send the wounded soldiers back to a casualty collection point. She would need to treat them on the spot with magic.

The soldiers were not yet dead, but it was neither a miraculous survival, nor was it because the soldiers were simply that good, so was this the demons’ aim? That said, she had no idea what the demons were planning.

Still, the option to simply let the soldiers die did not exist in Remedios’s heart. Nobody would ever discard the brave soldiers who had chosen to become a shield for their nation in order to buy their country time. And the most important thing was that she was a paladin of righteousness.

“Begin healing him!”

Remedios was accompanied not just by the elite paladins behind her, but also by several priests. Her order was directed at them.

In response, one of her Vice-Captains stepped up and whispered in her ear:

“Would it not be better to let the medics in the rear aid him? If we use the priests’ mana here, we might run out when fighting Jaldabaoth, which might be the demons’ aim—”

“—Ahhhh, you talk too much! This is an order! Heal him to the point where he can move on his own! Also—”

At this point, Remedios glanced at the adjutant beside her and said:

“—I can’t hear you muttering through your helmet, so speak up!”

“Ah, no, it’s fine…”

“Very good!”

The healing magic mended the soldiers’ wounds swiftly. Of course, the recovery was not complete. After all, this was only a first tier spell, and it could not fully restore a soldier on the verge of death. Even so, it was enough to heal the soldiers to the point where they could stagger around. Since the soldiers were no longer in danger of dying, there was no need to heal them any further. Remedios still remembered her sister’s incessant nagging to wisely use limited resources.

“You brave gentlemen, stay that way and listen. We’ve performed first aid on your wounds, so fall back. After that, let the medics at the rear tend to you.”

The pain of walking was probably enough to drive the soldiers to tears. However, she no longer had the time to hear them out. She had to reach her destination before Jaldabaoth arrived.

The soldiers also sensed the meaning in Remedios’s powerful gaze. None of them spoke up or protested; they simply agreed with each other.

“All right! Then let’s meet again later!”

Remedios broke into a sprint at the head of her troops. Her metal armor was lighter and easier to move in than it appeared, and given her physical abilities, she could reach her destination faster than anyone else. However, her sister, Calca and her adjutants often told her, “Don’t charge in by yourself all the time!” so Remedios throttled back the desire to sprint with all her might and quashed the desire to make up for lost time.

Soon, Remedios reached her destination, which was a corner of the city.

The streets spread out before them. The evacuation had been completed long ago, and so there was nobody there.

“Captain, if we follow this avenue and turn right, then turn right again, we’ll be at the plaza where we’ll be awaiting Jaldabaoth. Do you want us to scout ahead?”

“No, wait for Calca-sama and my sister — and the adventurers. After that, make your final checks and then hoist the banner high!”

Obeying Remedios’s orders, her subordinates tied a flag to a distant building. This was to inform the other units that the elite paladins led by Remedios had arrived.

Their operation would involve Calca and her personal guard, Queralt and the pick of the temples, high ranking adventurers, and a squad of Remedios’s elite paladins. The four units had split up and then headed to Jaldabaoth’s location.

There were roughly five hundred paladins in the order. Most of them were comparable to difficulty twenty monsters, and among them were great warriors capable of slaying a difficulty sixty monster one on one. All in all, there were twenty five of these ultra-elite warriors, who formed the core of Remedios’s forces.

Incidentally, the remaining three hundred-odd paladins were currently standing watch on the city walls against the advancing demihumans.

Originally, they should have formed up into a single group and moved out as one. However, Jaldabaoth possessed an area-attack ability that could bring down the wall, so they had chosen to split up in order to avoid being destroyed when their forces were concentrated. The reason why they had hung the flag in the distance was so that even if Jaldabaoth saw the flag and attacked it, it would not hamper the rest of the group.

“Can Jaldabaoth’s wall-breaking attack be used more than once, Isandro?”

There were two Vice-Captains in the Paladin Order.

One of them was an average swordsman, but excelled in other areas, and his name was Gustavo Montanjes. Right now, he was directing the paladins who were reinforcing the city walls, so he was not here.

There was another, who currently stood by Remedios’s side. The person to whom Remedios addressed her question was one of the Nine Colors as well, Isandro Sanchez, called “the Pink.”

“If he could use it multiple times, then I have no idea why he has not done so already. It might make more sense to consider that there might be some condition or some kind of delay until he can use it again.”

“Pretty much. I guess splitting up was being too paranoid.”

“No, it’s nothing of the sort. Perhaps he’s conserving his strength in order to bring forth some great power. We mustn’t be careless.”

“Yes yes, I know.”

Remedios broke off their conversation. She was not suited to thinking, after all.

Politics in particular made her head ache. She was completely baffled by the reason why the nobles frowned upon the fact that a woman had ascended to the throne of the Holy Queen.

They felt the same about Calca’s title, which was the combination of Holy King and Woman. They protested both the fact that they had a woman leading them and that a new term had to be coined for her.

On that note, it would be simpler to understand if it was just a matter of who was stronger or weaker.

“—Captain Custodio, the priest contingent and the adventurers have raised their flags.”

“How about Calca-sama?”

“Not yet.”

“Is that so… well, it’s about time to start casting longer-duration defensive spells. Once Calca-sama arrives, we’ll advance on Jaldabaoth first and act as bait to draw his attention. Keep your will strong and beware any special attacks the enemy has.”

“No movement from the plaza.”

They had confirmed that the advance force had been wiped out, and if their target had shifted location, the adventurers responsible for reconnaissance would have told them. If there was no news from them, that meant Jaldabaoth had not moved from the plaza where he had appeared.

“He’s looking down on us, that miserable little demon. Probably thinks that if he can kill us all here, he can conquer the country easily.”

“No, Captain. It’s also likely that he’s trying to stall for time. If we’re pinned down here fighting Jaldabaoth, the demihuman army will be able to win elsewhere.”

“...I see. So that’s possible too… this Jaldabaoth is pretty smart, huh.”

“I think he’s good at scheming because he’s a demon.”

“...Hmph. He’s just a demon who’s gotten full of himself, I’ll beat him like a dog and make him weep bitterly.”

Just as Remedios swore that to the gods, the final flag went up, as though it were waiting for that moment.

“Vice-Captain!”

“Yes ma’am! Everyone, we’re moving out!”

“All right! Follow me!”

Remedios began to run, determined to bury her sword in that demon’s face.

She turned a corner, ran again, then turned a corner once more.

And so, she saw a suspicious-looking person, standing in the middle of a plaza painted bright red and strewn with the bodies of the fallen. A tail protruded from that person’s waist.

His description was almost identical to the one provided by the fleeing soldiers.

He did not have bat-like wings or curled horns, and the only sign that he was inhuman was his tail. From that point of view, he was little more than a man in a mask.

However—

“Are you Jaldabaoth!?”

“Red ca — whoa!”

An acrid stench filled the air as they entered the plaza, that of blood and burst innards. There was a sound of squelching meat as she stepped in, but she was no longer concerned about such things. All that remained was charging with all her might and swinging her sword.

Her irritation built as Jaldabaoth effortlessly avoided her, and she swung again.

That too was evaded.

Remedios knew that however much time she put into her studies, she would never be able to excel in academics. For that reason, she spent all her time on improving her fighting skills instead, because she understood that she was more talented in that field. Thus, she had become known as the greatest warrior of this nation.

And now, the instincts of the paladin Remedios Custodio were screaming to her.

Jaldabaoth’s evasion was not a coincidence. He put on a show of conceit because he had the strength to back it up. Few human beings could keep up with the battle that was about to take place, and she would need to further enhance herself with magic.

Remedios’s instincts had never failed her at times like these.

“Fall back! All of you fall back! —No, form a cordon! This demon’s strong!”

Saying so, she backed away with her men. Her subordinates retreated further than her, but she could not go too far away. At most, she could move four meters back, at a range where she could take a single step and then cut him down.

Jaldabaoth rounded his shoulders.

“Haaa… what a bullish girl you are. What is it? Could it be you’ve seen something red?”

Remedios ignored the demon’s playful words, and the troops led by Queralt and Calca appeared in her field of vision. Shocked by the sight of Remedios engaged with Jaldabaoth, they made haste.

Jaldabaoth turned to face Calca, exposing his defenseless back to Remedios. However — her instincts told her that Jaldabaoth might just be waiting for her to attack him from behind, and so she froze.

“You two! He’s very strong! If you don’t pull your men back, they’ll only die for nothing!”

The two of them immediately responded to Remedios’s shout, and they were the only ones to step forward.

Remedios kept her distance from Jaldabaoth while circling around him until she stood in front of the two of them.

“Remedios, please don’t push yourself.”

“She’s right, nee-sama. Shouldn’t you take him on with everyone at once?”

Her eyes had not moved from Jaldabaoth even as she listened to their quiet words from behind her. Perhaps he was planning to unleash that wall-breaking power of his; if he made a move, she would dash up and hack him down.

However, Jaldabaoth showed no sign of doing so.

His relaxed attitude made Remedios unhappy.

I must, I have to strike him down!

“So you are Jaldabaoth?”

Jaldabaoth’s shrug in response to Calca’s question only intensified her displeasure. Every little thing that demon did only served to make her mad.

“Indeed. ...Your slave charged right at me without saying a word. What would she have done if it was a case of mistaken identity? Well, it does interest me that there are savages in the Holy Kingdom who are incapable of speech. Ah, just to be sure, may I ask if you are the reigning Holy King?”

“Indeed.”

“There’s no need to tell him your name, Calca-sama.”

Remedios leveled the point of her sword at Jaldabaoth.

“All you need to know is that he’s Jaldabaoth, and all we need to do after that is kill him and send him back to hell. Talking with him is just going to taint your tongue—”

“A-Ah, Remedios. We’re talking…”

Calca’s puzzled words made Remedios tilt her head. Had she said something about this earlier?

Queralt seemed to have a spell from the rear, because a surge of heat blazed up within her body, accompanied by incredible strength. Her attack from just now had been evaded, but now she was confident that she could strike him in this state. At this point, Remedios thought, So that’s it, because talking to him was meant to buy them time.

“—Still, I am magnanimous, so I shall chat with you for a while. Do you have any questions?”

Jaldabaoth pressed at the eye region of his mask, a motion Remedios had seen Calca, Queralt, and her Vice-Captains perform many times in the past.

“...Also, please, prepare yourselves until you are satisfied. The sight of you — who are desperately preparing yourselves to defeat me — being trampled and your lives taken by a power which surpasses even that; truly it is a sight to evoke ever greater despair in those who witness it with their own eyes. —What a wonderful sight it will be.”

“I won’t let that happen!”

“Sorry, Remedios, but could you quiet down for a bit?”

There was a hint of steel in Calca’s voice, and Remedios shut up. It was merely a slight change of tone, but from experience, Remedios knew that Calca was angry.

“Remedios, step back for a bit.”

“But, but if I move back, I won’t be able to cut him down if he does anything weird…”

“Ah, that is fine. I will not attack until we finish speaking, or until you launch an attack of your own.”

“As if we could believe what a demon say—”

"Remedies!"

“—Understood.”

Remedios fell back as ordered, and her sister whispered to her through her helmet.

“Calca-sama is trying to learn more from the opposition. You need to ignore what that demon says and bear with it.”

Muu, Remedios grimaced, her face seemingly saying, I’m not happy with this.

Their opponent was a demon. That being the case, they ought to consider that everything he said was probably a lie. Rushing in and cutting him up would save effort and brain cells. However, impeding her mistress was a betrayal of her loyalty. Thus, she had grit her teeth and endure this.

“Now then, Demon Emperor Jaldabaoth. I have some things to ask you. Why have you come here? If you wish to trample this country, why not move with the demihuman army from the fortress? Or could it be—”

“...Ah, you need say no more. I can imagine what you wish to say. It would seem you are mistaken. The reason I have come here alone is not to parley with you.”

A quiet “I see,” came from Calca, who was standing behind Remedios. She sounded clearly disappointed.

“There are two reasons why I have come here alone. The first is because crushing you by myself will deepen your despair that much more compared to if you were slain in a chaotic battle with the demihuman forces. The other reason is — in order to avoid making the same mistakes as from the Kingdom. I had not expected to meet a warrior there who was as powerful as myself. Therefore, the fact that I have come here alone is to see if there is a being comparable to me.”

“There might be, you know?”

“Of this I am certain — there are none. That is why I have given you all this time. If anyone like that did exist, they would be in this city — by the side of you, the most important person in this nation. Yet, I have not found anyone like that. That includes those snivelling rats hiding themselves away.”

“You bastard! Are you saying we’re weaker than that warrior!?”

Remedios could not pretend she had not heard those words, and they made her forget her forbearance and shout in anger. Calca and her sister’s words were already halfway out of her head, but the order not to cut him down just barely held on.

“That is exactly what I am saying. Did you not hear me? Is that all you wish to know, Holy Queen-sama?”

“While there’s one more thing — Angels, advance!”

Calca’s powerful voice filled the plaza, and the angels in the perimeter and hidden among the priests spread their wings and took flight.

There were five angels who held swords of fire, summoned through third tier spells — Archangel Flames. There were twenty more summoned through second tier spells, Angel Guardians. And then, there was a single angel which Calca had summoned before arriving here — a Principality of Peace.

While she did not remember what powers the angels possessed, she remembered that the Principality of Peace which Calca summoned could use low tier divine spells and could use abilities such as the ability to grant protection from evil, smite evil, and cause mass silence, among others. That was because she had often seen Calca summon it.

Sensing the murderous intent around her, Remedios understood that she no longer needed to hold back, and so she charged. Normally, the priests would have supported her with attack spells, but there were none. Perhaps they were conserving mana to summon angels.

Remedios activated a skill from one of her job classes, Evil Slayer. The divine power within her holy sword intensified.

In that moment, five adventurers suddenly appeared behind Jaldabaoth. They must have used invisibility magic to close in on him. She did not know why they had suddenly become visible. While she knew that there was a spell called 「Invisibility」, she had no idea what sort of spell it was or how it could be negated.

Jaldabaoth did not respond to the adventurers who had suddenly appeared. No — it did not seem like he had even noticed them.

At that moment, she wondered if she had been mistaken about the aura of intimidation from Jaldabaoth. Or rather, was this just an illusion or a copy, and the original was not here?

No — she denied the latter deduction. That could not be. Her instincts — her ability to sniff out evil — told her that Jaldabaoth was right there.

The adventurers looked shocked, and slashed at Jaldabaoth in a panic. Just as she thought that their weapons would be able to reach him, Jaldabaoth sprouted a set of strange wings behind him. They impaled the adventurers who had tried to attack him from behind.

Perhaps the frothy blood he was coughing up was because he had been stabbed in the chest and blood was flowing into his lungs, but with his last trace of life, a single adventurer swung his weapon down on Jaldabaoth.

However, Jaldabaoth let the strikes rain down on him, with no sign he had been harmed.

Since they were here, those adventurers ought to have been quite skilled. It was only reasonable to assume that they would be wielding holy-elemental weapons as part of their preparations. Even so, they could not leave a mark on him, showing that this demon was quite a highly ranked being.

In the few moments that it took the battle conditions to change, the charging Remedios screamed Yeeart! and slashed down diagonally with her holy sword.

Jaldabaoth hopped one step back, and those tentacle-like — no, they probably were tentacles — wings threw the perforated adventurers at her.

She had no intention of taking it head-on.

She took her left hand off her sword’s hilt, beating them all aside —

“「—Flow Acceleration」.”

—then activated a martial art, stepped forward, and thrust.

The holy sword stabbing in at Jaldabaoth’s throat was blocked by a set of suddenly-sprouted claws—

“「Holy Strike」!”

She infused the holy power within her sword into the claws in the instant they made contact.

This was an elementary technique for paladins, and it was originally intended to be used in the moment one’s blade bit into a foe’s flesh, but that did not mean it could not be used as a touch attack. Since most of the divine power simply exploded on the surface, it would not do much harm, but she had still used it anyway. That was because in the moment that the adventurers had been killed, her instincts as a paladin — which her little sister called an animal instinct — screamed that she needed to show that they could still resist Jaldabaoth, and prevent the morale of the surrounding soldiers from falling.

“I see…”

The Angels jammed themselves in between Remedios and Jaldabaoth as the latter was backing off. They launched their attack while floating at roughly head height.

“Tch,” Remedios clicked her tongue.

The metallic sound that rang out as her holy sword made contact with Jaldabaoth’s claws showed how hard those claws were. In addition, the fact that he could easily evade a blow from her magically-enhanced self — although in a somewhat clumsy fashion — showed how high his physical abilities were.

There were only a few people who could contend with such a mighty being. While the angels summoned through third and second tier spells usually excelled at slaying monsters, they only served to get in the way during this battle. In particular, the greaves of the angels floating back and forth were an eyesore.

“「Penetrate Magic - Holy Ray」.”

Her sister cast a spell. However, it vanished before Jaldabaoth’s face like it had been deflected.

“「Twin Penetrate Magic - Holy Ray」.”

Calca emitted two rays of light. She was probably thinking that it would be fine as long as one of them could pierce Jaldabaoth’s spell immunity, but unfortunately her attack was ultimately as ineffective as her sister’s.

That meant he possessed very high magic resistance. In other words—

I need to give it my all!

She shouted a battle cry to fire herself up.

“Use your head and let the angels fight! There’s no point in this!”

The fact was that even though the angels had the advantage of height and surrounded him on all sides, Jaldabaoth was still quite composed. But that was only natural. Even after being surrounded by so many people, not a single attack had hit Jaldabaoth.

The adventurers ran over to collect their comrades who had fallen by Remedios’s feet. While their immobile bodies were clearly dead, they still believed in the faint probability that it might nor be so.

“...How bothersome. Even if they are nothing more than insects, a swarm of them is still unpleasant.”

Jaldabaoth sounded perfectly composed.

Indeed, being able to negate the spells cast on him from the rear and perfectly evade physical attacks made him seem overwhelmingly superior. However—

Do you think we’ve never fought enemies like this before?

Unless their summoners were specialists, summoned monsters were generally weaker than the ones who called them forth. Therefore, there were cases where angels’ attacks ended up being useless.

Against a powerful foe, the best way to use angels was—

The airborne angels rushed Jaldabaoth as one. They did not use their swords, but tackled him.

—To hinder their opponents’ movements in this fashion.

It was quite effective.

Perhaps he was starting to grow tense, but Jaldabaoth went on the offensive, and a single swipe of his claws caused several angels to vanish into nothingness.

However, the angels from behind filled the gap, continuing the attack in place of their absent fellows.

This was the frightening thing about summoned monsters. Since they were beings that did not die even when they were killed, they could be fully utilized in this fashion.

The angels came like a ferocious waterfall, without rest or respite, and Jaldabaoth’s flowing counterattacks left Remedios staring in awe. However—

That’s carelessness on your part!

Remedios had moved subtly to step into an opening in Jaldabaoth’s defense, a fatal flaw that was exposed when he was on guard against the angels coming from above.

“—What!?”

“Yeeart!”

She activated a skill, and then her martial arts, using her holy sword to strike a blow with all her might.

She had chosen to conserve the greatest power of her holy sword because her instincts told her that then was not the time for that powerful move, which could only be used once a day.

Stricken by the mightiest blow she could muster apart from that move, Jaldabaoth flew back as though he was being smashed to the horizon, until he crashed into a store on the other side of the plaza.

Remedios looked down at the hands which held her blade.

“—Oh crap.”

“Nee-sama! You did it!”

She shouted angrily in response to her little sister’s excited exclamation.

“It’s not over yet! How could he have flown so far!?”

“Given your brute strength, I think it’s possible, Nee-sama...”

“He flew out by himself!”

Indeed, not only had she allowed Jaldabaoth to escape the encirclement, she had even given him the chance to hide in a house.

The reason why they could take on enemies like Jaldabaoth was because they could encircle their opponent and force them to face many people at once. Allowing him to hide in a cramped home was too dangerous.

In addition, Jaldabaoth’s actions would change now. It was possible he would stop playing around now.

“Remedios! What should we do?” Calca shouted.

Usually, Remedios would ask and then Calca would answer, but now the opposite was the case. During battle, she was better able to make the right choice than the other two.

“Demolish the house without going near it!”

After hearing that, the priests cast attack spells one after the other.

They collapsed the house in short order. However, it was hard to believe Jaldabaoth had been crushed under the falling debris. Even Remedios in her enchanted armor could survive that much unless she was very unlucky. Also—

Remedios looked down at her blade, which was unstained by blood.

Could he have rolled with that blow just by flying away? Had he used a martial art like 「Fortress」 or something? Or was it a demon-only skill? There were many possibilities for that, but things would become troublesome if she could not see through it.

Amidst the sounds of destruction, the neighboring houses crumbled under the area-effect spells. Dirt and dust filled the air, and she could not help coughing.

“Say, Remedios, why hasn’t Jaldabaoth come out yet?”

“...Nee-sama, could it be he’s already escaped by teleportation?”

That demon, who spoke so arrogantly? I can’t imagine he’d escape without being hurt...

“...We ought to use fire. Pour on the oil and ignite it. May I ask you to bless it, Calca-sama?”

“Nee-sama, are we going to conduct the ritual of Holy Fire? Doing so to harm an opponent… is that really what a paladin ought to be doing?”

“That’s fine, if Remedios thinks that’s the best way, then we’ll go with it. No, we should do it. Since he’s a demon, there’s no reason he won’t be hurt.”

Many demons were resistant to fire, but the Holy Fire was of the holy element, and fire resistance was only half as effective against it.

“Then, Calca-sama, the preparations for the ritual—”

“We don’t have time for that. Please use the simplified version.”

Calca looked straight ahead as she said that, and from the corner of Remedios’s eye, she saw her little sister wondering if she should go “But that—”

Simplifying the Holy Fire ritual spell would place a great deal of strain on the user’s body. This was not something which she, as one of Calca’s subordinates charged with keeping her safe, ought to recommend. However, it would be even worse if they gave Jaldabaoth time.

“If you think this is the best way, then we’ll do it. However, if I perform it by myself, I won’t be able to help you after that. Please keep that in mind… Then, can you light the fire right away?”

“Understo—”

“—Kukuku. My, this is quite vexing.”

Suddenly, Jaldabaoth’s voice issued from the pile of debris.

“Nee-sama!”

“I know!”

Remedios immediately stood in front of Calca and readied her sword.

Jaldabaoth had been buried under the house after all. Therefore, bringing up the Holy Fire attack just then was the right choice. They had not thought that he might have lost consciousness because of the shock of being buried under the fallen house.

“It would seem that it is time for me to get serious.”

“Oh? Then we should have done it earlier. I’ll wait, so why don’t you show me your power? ...Calca-sama, Queralt, get back.”

Remedios whispered her directions to the other two. At the same time, Remedios fell back as well, allowing the resummoned angels to form a wall along the path between themselves and Jaldabaoth.

“Oh yes. In that case, please get back. It would be quite disappointing if you were to die from my shockwave.”

The collapsed pile of timbers and bricks swelled up. As they collapsed to the ground, something massive slowly stood up from among them.

“...Jaldabaoth?” Remedios could not help muttering under her breath.

That was because he looked completely different from the previous Jaldabaoth. It made her wonder if he had changed places with another demon. However, there could not be many demons who looked like that.

Indeed, that was Jaldabaoth. That was Jaldabaoth’s true form.

It flapped its fiery wings, and flames burned at the end of its long tail. Its brawny, frightening arms were also on fire. Its wicked face bore a wrathful expression.

“Priests, order the angels to charge!”

Obeying Calca’s order, the priests commanded their summoned angels to rush in. Jaldabaoth did not strike back at the angels as they swung down with their weapons, it simply endured the blows in silence. Even though it was surrounded and pounded, it did not seem hurt in the slightest. It looked just like a horde of children trying to hit a fully armored paladin with sticks.

“This is my true nature.”

Jaldabaoth spoke in a coarse, basso profundo voice that seemed to shake the pits of their stomachs. It took a step forward, and the mass of angels pressing against it were forced back.

It ignored every single attack the angels made as it slowly raised its flame-wreathed hands, and then clenched them into fists. Its fiery form resembled a red-hot volcanic bomb.

“Now, you foolish and bothersome insects — disappear.”

With a bang, the angels which should have been in front of Remedios vanished.

Jaldabaoth had punched with extraordinary speed, and even Remedios’s trained motion vision could not capture a single frame of its movement. Just that single hit was enough to exterminate all the angels that were forming a wall for Remedios.

This was Jaldabaoth’s true form.

Remedios gulped as she witnessed that overwhelming power which could easily slaughter multiple angels in a single blow, and then she gripped her holy sword tighter. Her sweat gushed forth and it seemed like it was making her clothes change color under her armor.

Could — could she win this? No—

“—Yeeeeeeaaart!”

Remedios shouted to banish her fear. While it was a thoughtless move, if she did not charge right now, she would be essentially admitting defeat to him in her heart. She gripped her holy sword tightly, and leapt forward.

She used the full might of her body in a massive downwards chop.

Jaldabaoth did not block or dodge it.

And then — it bounced off with laughable ease.

“...Eh?”

The sword, made of an unknown metal that was harder than adamantite, bounced off Jaldabaoth’s skin.

She looked up and saw that Jaldabaoth was not looking at her. It was similar to how a human being would not care about a worm writhing around on the ground.

“Dealing with you empty-handed is a little troublesome… no, there is an excellent weapon here.”

Jaldabaoth stepped forward, paying no heed to Remedios. His massive body shoved her aside.

“Wha—? D-Dammit!”

Remedios and the freshly-summoned angels chopped at Jaldabaoth’s back. However, his metallic-gleaming skin remained untouched beneath their blades.

They hit him with attack spells. However, all of them bounced off.

This bastard’s not stopping at all, what’s he looking at—

Remedios’s face turned pale as she looked in the direction Jaldabaoth was headed. Calca and Queralt were there.

“You lot, do something! Stop him! Hurry up and stop him!”

Remedios barked her orders at the paladins behind them. She could not think of what use they could be, but she could not let Jaldabaoth reach Calca and Queralt.

“Let Calca and Queralt pull back! He’s going for the two of them!”

The paladins and priests closed ranks in front of the two of them, forming a wall. What a pathetically weak wall.

“Stop! Stop!! STOP!!!” Remedios screamed as she swung her sword over and over again.

However, nothing she did managed to pierce Jaldabaoth’s skin.

The paladins swung their swords, the priests cast their spells, but even so, they could not impede Jaldabaoth in the slightest. He walked on nonchalantly, without saying a word.

The people who touched the flames coiling around him wailed and collapsed to the ground, but Jaldabaoth did not look like he intended to attack.

“The two of you, run! We can’t stop him as we are now!!” Remedios shouted, her head in a state of total confusion.

Jaldabaoth should have been driven off by the adventurers of the Kingdom. She was in the same league as adamantite ranked adventurers, perhaps even stronger. In that case, why could she do nothing about Jaldabaoth?

There’s got to be something I can do! I have to find it! I have to find something I can do to harm him!

There must have been some reason for Jaldabaoth’s invincibility. Just like how some monsters were highly resistant to all metals besides silver, there must be some kind of racial defensive ability protecting his body.

But what kind of ability is it!!!!!?????

Her ever reliable instincts told her nothing.

Until this point, it had always been her Vice-Captains or Queralt or Calca giving orders. All she had to do was carry them out. However, all three of them had nothing to say now.

Frustration began to build in Remedios, but she was clear about one thing.

As long as the two of them escaped, they would prevent Jaldabaoth from achieving his aims.

The two of them seemed to understand that too, because they turned and ran without looking back.

That was good. There was no time for people to lollygag around like idiots on a real battlefield. Even if Remedios died, so long as the Holy Queen, the head of state, survived, there would still be hope, And even if the worst-case scenario unfolded and the Holy Queen died, so long as her sister was still alive and they managed to recover her body, they could bring her back to life.

Several priests — probably capable of third tier spells — stood guard by Calca’s side. With them serving as walls, that ought to be able to buy the two of them more time to flee.

“Hmph. 「Greater Teleportation」.”

Suddenly, Jaldabaoth vanished, and the sword in her hand struck nothing but air.

“What!?”

Remedios panicked and looked around, and then a piteous wail reached her ears. Remedios’s heart lurched. The sound had come from the direction where the two of them had run.

However, the wall of paladins kept her from seeing what was going on.

The power of the magic items she possessed suppressed her terror, but her anxiety continued welling up. If her sister and their guards were killed, then only Calca could stand against Jaldabaoth. She was the pinnacle of the Holy Kingdom; if she was lost, then the country would fall with her.

“Out of my wayyyyy!” Remedios shouted as she broke into a sprint. The paladins hurriedly parted their ranks for her.

She was too far from Calca.

How slow her body was.

Remedios had always thought her strength of arm and fleetness of foot were at the zenith of human ability, and it was a silent source of pride for her. However, this moment was the first time she learned that it was nothing but false vanity.

All she needed to do was survive a single hit. However badly hurt she was, there were many priests here. There was a way, so long as she did not die.

While Remedios told herself that as she ran, she saw that Jaldabaoth had taken hold of Calca. She did not have the luxury of verifying Queralt’s safety.

Jaldabaoth’s massive hand was closed around Calca’s legs. Those hands were wreathed in flame. She heard something like her flesh sizzling under the heated armor, and her helmeted face seemed to have gone mad with pain as she clenched her neat rows of teeth.

The despicable bastard! He’s taken a hostage!

Was Jaldabaoth going to make some kind of demand — having taken a fighting stance, Remedios found herself doubting the words he said next.

“An excellent weapon.”

“—Huh?”

Remedios glanced at the holy sword she was holding.

Did he want that?

“From the moment I first saw it, I felt that it would make an excellent weapon.”

He raised his arm, lifting Calca to his line of sight. Jaldabaoth flexed his arms. It looked just like he was making practice swings.

There was a crack, and Calca whimpered in barely-suppressed agony.

Unable to bear the force of Jaldabaoth’s overwhelming power and the weight of her own body, the joint of her knee now bent in a direction it was never intended to face.

It was then that Remedios realised Jaldabaoth’s meaning.

He meant to use the Holy Queen, Calca Bessarez, as a weapon.

“You, what are you…”

She could not understand it.

However, she had no choice but to understand it.

“All right, is it my turn now?”

A wicked smile appeared on that furious face, and Jaldabaoth approached her.

What should she do?

Remedios backed off, and the paladins behind her retreated as well.

What, what can I do at a time like this? What should I do?

Remedios looked around for help, and behind Jaldabaoth, she saw the priests protecting Calca and Queralt collapsed on the ground.

While the priests were motionless, her sister was still moving faintly. Perhaps she had secretly cast a spell.

Queralt’s still alive! But who should I save first — I have to ask Isandro.

“Isandro! What should we do!?”

“Retreat!”

“Understood! Everyone, retreat! Fall back! Fall back!”

“—What? Not fighting? And after I went to all this effort to obtain a weapon with which to crush you… 「Fireball」.”

Jaldabaoth extended the hand that was not holding Calca and discharged a third tier attack spell. The fireball flew over and burst, immolating the paladins within its area of effect.

Protected by fire resistance spells, the paladins barely managed to avoid being fatally wounded. However, it was simply that they had not died.

Calca squirmed and struggled desperately, but she could not escape Jaldabaoth’s hold.

“What an annoying woman. You are a weapon now. Act like one.”

Jaldabaoth’s body flexed slightly as he raised the arm that held Calca.

“STOP!” Remedios cried out in mournful agony as she realized what Jaldabaoth intended. And then, Jaldabaoth swung down, ignoring her wails.

Splat.

Calca could not protect herself in time, and her face smashed viciously into the ground.

After that, Jaldabaoth slowly raised his arm again, and Calca dangled limply from his hand, having lost the will to resist him.

Her helmet was open-faced. That was to raise the troops’ morale with her beauty.

However, that beautiful face was now a mass of fresh blood. It would seem the bridge of her nose had been crushed flat, because that part of her face was a smooth expanse now.

“You son of a bitch!”

“You idiot! Stop!”

One of her men — a paladin — could not stop himself from drawing his sword and charging out. She wanted to stop him, but it was too late.

Jaldabaoth swung his weapon at the paladin, with a speed that did not seem like he was holding a human body

The two of them collided, and the paladin was sent flying with a thunderous crash of metal.

His armor was staved in like he had been hit by a giant, showing how intense the collision with Calca had been.

Remedios’s eyes could not leave Calca’s body.

Humans might have softer skins than other species, but strong humans could enfold their bodies in ki or magic, and if they were still conscious, they might be able to be endure a slash without being hurt.

Indeed. If they were conscious.

Perhaps it had been knocked loose by the impact, because her helmet had flown off and her long hair played wildly in the wind. Her inverted face was a bloody mess, her nose smashed and her front teeth shattered, her eyes rolled up and a faint moan leaking from her throat. Her beauty, regarded as a national treasure, had vanished without a trace. Her present state was too tragic for words.

“What should we do, Isandro!? How can we save Calca!?”

“I, I don’t know!”

“What the hell are you good for, then!? Doesn’t that brain of yours exist for times like these!?”

“I never imagined something like this could happen! There’s nothing we can do but pull back!”

“So you want me to abandon my sister and Calca here!?”

“What else can we do!?”

And Remedios had nothing to say.

“Good grief. The sight of humans squabbling before their enemy is a fearsome sight. Well, it is about time. Playtime is over.”

“What?”

Jaldabaoth slowly looked to the sky.

“It is about time that my army arrived at this city. I need to smash the gates and usher in a storm of slaughter and carnage.”

“Do, do you think we’ll let you do that?”

“Allow me? I do not need you to allow me anything. All you need to do is accept it. Like say, the gift of a star.”

Jaldabaoth raised the hand that was not holding Calca, and then, like he was searching for something — he pointed to the sky.

“—STOP!!!” Remedios shouted because she did not know what he was going to do.

However, everyone was frozen in place, their hands tied. That was because they could not attack Jaldabaoth, who held the Holy Queen hostage.

No, everyone was afraid that if they attacked him, he would block it with Calca’s body. What would they do if Calca died from their blows?

Heedless to the confusion of Remedios and the others — the star fell.