

OVERLORD

The Vampire Princess of the Lost Country

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オーバーロード

亡国の吸血姫

丸山くがね

OVERLORD

- BONUS VOLUME -

The Vampire Princess of the Lost Country
-A Strange Tale of the Absolute Ruler-

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[Nigel]









Prologue

PROLOGUE

As he sat on the throne, Momonga ignored the faint satisfaction and redoubled shame he felt for a moment and began looking around the interior of the room, whereupon he saw Sebas and the maids standing stock-still and motionless. Standing so rigidly in this room made him feel a little lonely.

He recalled that there was a command for this. Momonga thought back to the commands he had seen before, and then extended a hand before gently waving it from top to bottom.

“Kneel.”

Albedo, Sebas, and the six maids (Pleiades); all of them knelt before him in a show of respect by subjects to their master.

That was good.

Momonga raised his left hand, and checked the time.

23:55:48,49,50—

He ought to be just in time.

Right now, the GMs were probably nonstop broadcasting and others were setting off fireworks outside. However, Momonga — who had blocked all these things out — did not know of them.

Momonga leaned against the throne, and slowly raised his head to the ceiling.

He had built Nazarick, this most difficult dungeon, with his friends. For that reason, Momonga had thought that a group of players might decide to invade on this final day.

Momonga waited.

He would welcome any challengers in his capacity as Guildmaster.

While he had sent messages to all former members, the number of people who did actually arrive could be counted on one hand.

Momonga waited.

He would welcome any returning friends in his capacity as Guildmaster.

“A relic of the past, huh—” Momonga mused.

While this guild was nothing more than an empty shell now, he had had enjoyable times in the past.

He shifted his gaze to count the gigantic flags dangling from the ceiling. There were a total of 41 of them in all, the same number as there were guild members. Each flag bore an emblem of a member. Momonga extended a bony white finger to point at one of them, and allowed the memories in his mind to reawaken... but his hand stopped halfway through the motion.

—Now's not the time for such things!

Momonga thought about a certain plan he had prepared for today.

A plan for a glorious finish at the end.

In order to celebrate with his friends who had come back on the last day of operation, in order to do something big with them right at the very end, Momonga had gone to a shopping district that he almost never visited, purchasing vast quantities of items, intending to use them to conduct an event.

However, while several of his friends had come all the way back to the guild, regretfully none of them stayed until the very end.

Those particular friends who did come back... had of course put their real lives first. As Momonga had watched many of his friends leave the guild for the same reason, it was a conclusion he had anticipated.

Even so, Momonga still felt terribly lonely, and terribly frustrated at the same time.

It was because these two emotions filled his heart that he had completely forgotten that his original intention was to take part in the event with his friends. No, perhaps it

was because he did not want to remember it.

Perhaps there might have been another ending, which was to forget about the event and sit on the throne to await the end.

However, he thought of it now.

In that case—

Momonga suddenly rose to his feet.

I have to go! Even if it's only me! I need to give this whole thing a glorious final conclusion, even if it's only me!

There was no more time.

Momonga released the Staff of Ainz Ooal Gown which had been in his firm grip, and at once activated the ring on his right ring finger — the Ring of Ainz Ooal Gown.

As he operated the Ring of Ainz Ooal Gown, a list of teleport destinations appeared.

However, the first to appear was his own room. *Why the hell was it set to a place like that?* Momonga griped over something that normally would never have bothered him, and scrolled through the selections.

“Got it!”

Momonga could not keep himself from exclaiming in delight.

After finding the teleport destination closest to the surface, Momonga was about to tap it when he hesitated for a moment.

Momonga’s eyes went toward the Staff of Ainz Ooal Gown.

As a Guild Weapon, its destruction meant the destruction of the guild. From that point of view, leaving it there was the safest choice he could make.

However, had Momonga not thought of something before he had earlier taken it up?

That's right, walk with me — for you are the proof that the Guild Ainz Ooal Gown once

existed.

Momonga gripped the staff tight, and activated the power of the ring.

The teleportation went through in an instant, and he was transported to an expansive room.

There were two rows of narrow stone biers used to lay corpses to rest on either side of him — though they were unoccupied now. The floor was made of polished limestone. To the rear was a flight of stairs heading down, and at their bottom was a set of double doors — the doors leading to the first floor of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick.

This was the closest place to the surface to which the ring's teleportation power could take him.

The displayed location name indicated that this was the Central Mausoleum of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick.

"I need to hurry!" Momonga shouted, to spur himself on.

He glanced at the watch on his left hand, and the time was—

23:58:03

—He was almost out of time.

It was as though he could hear the door-closing chime of the train doors cease, replaced by the hissing of air from within the door.

Momonga cast *<Fly>*, as though he were a salaryman sprinting up the stairs.

Despite his panic, Momonga's movements as he scrolled down the console and selected the flight spell were not misplaced in the slightest.

Every spell had its place on the spellcasting console.

If he did not know these things, if he made any mistakes when he needed to cast spells, it would affect activities such as combat. For that reason, Momonga had spent upwards of a year memorizing every single position of the console. While this effort

left his other teammates dumbfounded, Momonga had still never managed to beat Touch Me even once despite his hard work. Even so, Momonga had always felt that his good PVP track record was due to his practical diligence, which was probably true.

Momonga flew with all his might towards the great swamp surrounding the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick.

Posture control during flight was surprisingly difficult. He had once heard someone say it was like playing a dogfighting game. Still, if he was only flying in a straight line, then simple movements would suffice. Or rather, there was no need to control anything at all. All he had to do was not touch the control interface.

Once he left the surface portion of Nazarick — in other words, the graveyard — behind him, he would be in the mist-filled swamp region.

The forms of monsters appeared in the mists, but right now, all active mobs had been set to an inactive state, so he would not be attacked so long as he did not strike first.

This shift to inactive mode had been implemented roughly a week ago. That, combined with the frequent sightseeing activities, had apparently led to a lot of new discoveries.

Even Momonga could not contain a gasp of delight when he saw the videos of those discoveries. As for the ones which had not drawn such reaction from him, he instead cursed, *How the hell would anyone know about this, were the devs stupid?* in his mind.

I thought that someone would try to invade us for sightseeing. After all, they'd be able to pass through the Grenbera Swamp without expending any resources.

But nobody had come.

It was worth celebrating, of course, but at the same time it also made him feel lonely, as though he had been completely forgotten by the world. Something like that.

Momonga narrowed his eyes — although his expression did not change. He had reached his destination, an island floating on the swamp.

It was a curious little island.

It was not very large, but it was covered with a great deal of cylindrical objects, enough to fill its entire surface.

Momonga produced a stick-like object with a button from his pocket dimension, and held it in the hand which was not holding the Guild Weapon.

“Here I go!”

As he exclaimed those words in a forceful tone that he would normally never use, Momonga pressed down hard on the button.

In that moment, the cylinders, which were so tightly packed that there was hardly any space between them, all discharged balls of light into the skies above. They were too close together, so it looked just like a gigantic ball of light.

They were fireworks sold by the YGGDRASIL developers — or perhaps the operations team — at a low price.

Momonga had purchased around ten thousand fireworks and arranged them on this island. However, he had not set them all out, because he had gotten bored halfway through. Right now, Momonga probably had at least a quarter of those fireworks still in his inventory.

“...I need to wake up at 4 tomorrow, huh.”

Momonga watched the receding afterglow in the sky, muttering morosely to himself as he watched the orbs of light climb slowly into the sky. He had originally intended to enjoy this scene with his friends who came back to celebrate the last day of the game with him. However, there was nobody by Momonga’s side now.

And then, a massive explosion burst in the sky. Light overlapped with more light; it was no longer a fireworks display, but something that was almost like the super tier spell <Fallen Down>.

The flashing lights enveloped Momonga as he flew.

Ah...

Momonga did not know how it would feel when a DMMO’s servers shut down.

This was because Momonga, no, because Suzuki Satoru had not played any games other than YGGDRASIL. However, he was sure that it would not end in a hopeful way. He was sure it would be like a sudden snapping of a string and he would be forcefully

kicked back to reality.

Even so—

Maybe it would feel better if it ended while I was surrounded with light—

He would return to the real world several seconds later. Even so, this moment felt like it was made to vividly display the joy of Suzuki Satoru.

And then—

—Momonga began to panic.

He had thought that once the light faded, he would be greeted by the familiar sight of his room beyond a pane of thin glass. *After all, YGGDRASIL was going to be shut down,* he thought. However, what he actually saw turned out to be something else entirely.

“...What’s this?” Momonga muttered to himself.

That had not come from loneliness, but because he had encountered something he could not understand.

The first thing which came into view was the night sky. Constellations sparkled all around him, and the slow-moving clouds seemed to be trying to cover up their light. He could see the towering peaks of mountains in the distance, and the dark forests at their foothills rippled like waves in the breath of the night wind.

It was a sight he could not see in the real world — aside from the arcologies — and it was as though he had never left the game at all.

He looked down — and saw that he was floating in the air. Well, that was fine. After all, he had just cast a <Fly> spell.

However, what lay beneath his feet was not a swamp.

—Instead, it was ruins.

It was not just a mere one or two buildings, but on the scale of a town — no, it was greater than that. He could see a building that looked like a castle in the distance, and a wall surrounding a city. These ruins had once been a fairly large city. There were

various signs that showed that it had not been conquered so much as abandoned for some reason.

While he was several hundred meters above the city, he had no way of knowing exactly what was going on inside it. However, Momonga could not help but recall the abandoned underground city with an automated puppet production plant, Vilisyrteria.

No, this isn't like Vilisyrteria. It looks different... what on earth is this place?

With a surprising degree of calmness, Momonga checked the watch on his left hand.

0:03:45, 46, 47...

"...Hah?"

Momonga glanced around at his surroundings again. The landscape was unfamiliar. Granted, there was no way Momonga could know what every single square inch of YGGDRASIL's map looked like. Perhaps there was scenery like this tucked away in some corner of the game.

However, this was the last day of the game. The game had been scheduled to end at twelve midnight, and now that time had passed. There was no way the display would be in error.

What, what is this?

YGGDRASIL's end of operations had been delayed. Or perhaps it would show him something like this if he did not log out on his own. Various possibilities flashed through his mind.

Did they delay the server shutdown?

The most likely possibility was that a certain — an undeniable — reason had led to a delay in the closure of the servers.

If that were the case, the GMs would have announced something. Momonga hurriedly made to open the communications function that he had shut off until today — and then he froze in place.

The control console did not show up.

What... happened? What is this?

As a mix of anxiety and doubt filled him, Momonga tried activating other functions.

None of them responded.

It was as though he had been completely cut off from the system.

...What's going on?

Rather he should be thinking about what to do next. *Where's the control interface for the <Fly> spell* — as he thought that, Momonga suddenly realized that there was no need for it.

Momonga slowly lowered his altitude.

What's going on? What is all this? Why can I use <Fly>? No, wait, that's not all, is it?

Momonga had suddenly “understood” how to control the <Fly> spell by feeling alone. He was not even conscious of it; it was as though it were perfectly natural.

This was a very abnormal situation.

After that, Momonga looked at his hands.

His left hand held the symbol of the guild, the Staff of Ainz Ooal Gown. His right hand held the launcher for the fireworks.

It was true that nothing had changed. There was no doubt that those bony white hands belonged to Momonga, just like in YGGDRASIL.

However, the sensation was different. Precisely detailing the difference was a little difficult, but there was a strong sense that those were his own hands. While they were the same hands from YGGDRASIL, there was a perfectly natural feeling to them, like he was looking at his own hands from the real world.

However, it was his ability to remain calm despite being in a situation like this which scared him more than anything.

Unconsciously, Momonga recalled the words his friend had once said.

Anxiety is the seed of defeat, you must think logically and keep your cool at all times. Stay calm, broaden your vision, don't get caught up on small details, and let your thoughts flow—

Ahh, yes.

His first consideration ought to be “Where is this place?”

If only there was someone I could ask... no, it would be better if there wasn't, right?

Momonga fell into contemplation as he descended toward the ground. Perhaps he should investigate his surroundings from the air with <Fly>… or not. Though it was a set of tumbled ruins, there were still many houses which retained their form within. There might be infiltrators there. It seemed like there might be someone hiding in the little alleys between the ruined houses peeking out at him.

Open spaces might offer a good field of view, but it was essentially exposing oneself to the enemy.

While he did not think that anyone would still be thinking of PKing him in the face of this incomprehensible state of events, and it was possible that Momonga was the only one who had ended up this way, he ought to move stealthily until he had unravelled this mystery.

Also, Momonga was holding the proof of the guild, the Staff of Ainz Ooal Gown. That ought to cut down on the probability of being PKed.

That being the case, this was the first measure he ought to take.

<Perfect Unknowable>

Momonga cast a spell. This was a high-tier spell that far surpassed <Invisibility>. Now, he ought to be invisible, barring the use of some special spell or ability. While that was a trivial obstacle to a select group of players, it ought to reduce the chances of him being PKed too.

Momonga looked at his bony white hands and looked down. He could still see himself, and there was no indicator which told him that he was invisible. All in all, he had no confidence that he really was invisible.

As he descended, the details of the city gradually came into view. The residents had probably abandoned it quite a while ago, since he could see signs where houses had collapsed from rot.

What happened to this city? More to the point, what on earth is going on now? Did YGGDRASIL 2 start? Or is this a hidden event by the devs? Like say, being forcibly teleported here if you didn't log out at the end? But in that case, how do you explain this realism?

He could not find the answer, no matter how he agonized over it.

As he descended, Momonga thought about using a skill.

There were many kinds of skills, but using undead creation skills while invisible did him no good. All it would do was expose his position. While he could use them to set a trap, given the present circumstances it might make someone who could have been friendly become suspicious instead.

Should I cover my face up? No, it feels like people who cover their faces are suspicious... good grief...

Momonga activated one of his skills. It was the ability to detect undead.

In YGGDRASIL, places like this often had undead in them. As such, Momonga had used the skill almost subconsciously. As he did, the skill told Momonga a piece of bad news.

“!”

Momonga had originally been descending slowly, but now he suddenly plunged down at great speed and hid himself in a two-story building whose roof had collapsed.

The speed of his descent threw up a cloud of dust. Momonga hurriedly waved his arm to try and settle it, but to no avail.

It was a fairly spacious room. The furniture inside had been crushed under the fallen roof, and after exposure to the elements they had completely rotted away.

He maintained his <Fly> spell so his feet did not touch the ground. This was because he had considered the possibility that the floorboards might collapse. If he continued observing the situation in this way, he ought to be able to learn more about it.

However, Momonga had something more important to think about—

—*What the hell's going on? Why is the surrounding area full of undead reactions? Where on earth was I teleported to?*

The fact was, Momonga had glanced toward an area bearing an undead response before he had ducked into this house, and he had definitely seen a human-like figure there. Its uncoordinated movements were most certainly not those of a living creature.

Momonga remained still as he pressed himself to the wall and focused all his energies on spying on the outside. Even if he could detect the undead, he could not determine their strength. The most powerful undead creatures included beings that could see through <Perfect Unknowable>.

Right now, there were two things that Momonga ought to do.

One of them was to leave — to be precise, go far away from — this place until the undead reactions vanished.

The other was to investigate the level and so on of the undead creatures, and if they were of a level he could handle, find out where exactly he was.

He ought to pick one of those options.

However, there was no guarantee that he would be safe if he left. In that case, it would be better to stay here and investigate the undead reactions. In addition, Momonga was one of the undead as well, so it was very likely that he would not be attacked as long as he took no hostile actions.

Well, assuming it's really just undead out there.

Momonga recalled the feeling of using the <Fly> spell, and confidence welled up in him.

It'll be fine. I don't know why, but I'm confident that I won't have any problems casting attack spells too... No, this actually feels kind of bad. I don't feel like myself any more... —No. I'll think about that problem later. More importantly, I'll have any number of ways to escape as long as I can cast <Teleport.> If anything happens, all I need to do is teleport into the air, to a distance that lets me escape.

Momonga looked around, then at the floor — which was covered in the remains of the collapsed ceiling — and then at the ruins of the roof.

“...It won’t collapse, I hope.”

Talking to himself was a sign of uneasiness.

The character called Momonga would be fine even if the roof fell on him.

But that was ultimately an YGGDRASIL thing, and even if he could use his spells and skills normally, there was no guarantee that his body would function the same way it did in the game.

Then again, I have these eyes. I can use my darkvision normally too. Should I assume my passive skills are functioning normally as well? Speaking of which, isn’t the tech level here a bit low?

This building did not use steel rebar or concrete. The debris scattered at his feet was hard to make out given that it had been thoroughly pulverized, but it looked to have been made of wood and bricks.

Is this... still YGGDRASIL after all? No, although it feels like the answer ought to be close to it...

No matter how he thought about it, this simply was not the real world. But even if that were the case, it still left many questions unanswered.

Momonga put that question aside for the time being and cast a spell. He started with <Message>. He ought to see if he could contact someone else, whether it was a GM or another player.

After a while, he began to grumble.

“I can’t connect, huh...”

He could not contact anyone and neither could he log out. It was as though he was trapped in this world.

Then next... let’s try looking around the surroundings to gather information. In that case, I’ll use—

“<Remote Viewing>.”

He created a magical sensor and let it float in the air.

This was a bet. It would be a pain if there were undead that could see through invisibility, but it would be worse if the opposition had ways to interfere with detection spells or even to counterattack against divinations.

However, what Momonga felt afterwards was confusion.

“What the heck is this...”

What he saw now was completely different than in YGGDRASIL. In YGGDRASIL, using <Remote Viewing> would create a viewing window in the corner of his vision. One could adjust the window's size at will, but fundamentally it would be depicted as a different image.

However, it was different now.

It was as though he had opened a new set of eyes, and with it, another field of vision.

He did not know whether to call it fascinating or bizarre. Still, it was not a problem. It felt natural to him, and he could operate the spell as normal. He even felt that he had completely changed.

Momonga ignored his brief confusion and used <Remote Viewing> to catch sight of the undead creature.

A man was stumbling along, in a mindless lurch.

There were cloudy eyes beneath the opened lids, and he showed no signs of blinking.

It would seem this was not a high-level undead being. Rather, it was a low-level one — a Zombie. Only, a Zombie's appearance was typically very gruesome, but not in the case of this undead being. It did not look like it had suffered major damage or was badly rotted. It looked just like a clean corpse moving around.

An undead being like this... if this were YGGDRASIL... no, why am I thinking about this like it's not YGGDRASIL? This might be some big patch... but after the servers shut down? How could that be... ah!

Momonga suddenly realized something, and he shouted in a voice that would not agitate the nearby Zombies.

"This is illegal! It's illegal confinement! Let me out of here!"

If this really was in the game, and if it was being managed by someone, then it was very likely that those words would be recorded. The Computer Act-mandated helmet that Suzuki Satoru was wearing would also record it. If the company noticed, they would probably take some kind of action. However, he did not see any response along those lines.

As I thought... this isn't YGGDRASIL after all? I don't think the company would gain anything by deliberately targeting me for a crime either... But the game becoming reality or whatnot is im... or is it not impossible? Plus, the fact that I'm using these skills and spells like they were a part of me is also extremely weird...

Momonga shook his head.

That was also very important, but his priority now was to take stock of the situation around him. He had to protect himself first. If he died, would the game end with him logging out, or would it just be the end because this was now reality?

Momonga let the spell-created sensor float past the male Zombie's eyes.

There was no response.

The man continued shambling forward.

He couldn't see it... so can I be sure it's a Zombie?

As he watched the man leave, Momonga let the <Remote Viewing> sensor continue down the road.

He encountered over ten more undead beings on the road, and they were all the same — Zombies.

Still, there sure are a lot of them.

Some of them were walking around in circles inside their houses, and others roamed up and down the streets.

It looked like the entire city was under the rule of the undead.

That said, this was hardly strange in YGGDRASIL. In truth, there were quite a few underground cities there which were ruled by the undead. Among them included locations which could be converted into bases after defeating the boss monsters within. While Momonga had not been to such places before, the videos of it which had been uploaded portrayed a beautiful paradise city.

Before long, Momonga finished exploring his surroundings.

All he had learned was that there were no other undead creatures here other than Zombies, and that the entire area was in ruins, with no survivors.

Momonga exhaled with a “whew” — although he had no idea how his bony, lungless body could have done it — and dispelled his <Remote Viewing> and <Perfect Unknowable> spells.

He had been worrying about what he would do if there were players — especially PKs — around, but it would seem he had been wasting his efforts. Plus, depending on the situation, it might not be impossible that he could raise his arms in surrender when making contact with other parties to gain information about them.

After a period of rumination, Momonga checked that he could still teleport normally, then left the house and took to the streets.

While he did not dare to place too much faith in his strength, there should not be any problems if he could use the same spells as he normally could. No, even if things went bad, he should still be able to escape.

If possible, he would have liked to gauge his strength by killing a Zombie, but that would be too dangerous.

While this was based on his knowledge of YGGDRASIL, low-intelligence undead like Zombies would view Momonga as one of them and thus not initiate attacks against him. However, things would be different if he launched an attack instead. It might even provoke a hostile response from all the surrounding Zombies in a chain reaction, until all the undead in the entire city considered him a valid target for attacks.

Something like that which would only sap his strength and increase the number of his enemies would be a last resort. Currently, he ought to prioritize gathering information.

Momonga left the ruined house.

Taking his first step out required a great deal of courage and made his heart race — although he had no heart to speak of — but the first Zombie he met did not react to him with hostility, and walked away from Momonga as though nothing had happened. With that, the tremendous weight crushing down on Momonga lifted off him.

He investigated the surrounding streets, and reached a conclusion.

For starters, technology here was not particularly advanced. There were no signs at all of electrical appliances, and modern construction techniques would not feature cement and unevenly-shaped bricks. It was possible that there were power lines buried in the ground, but in that case it would be entirely impossible to go on with daily life. This was also the first time he had seen stoves outside of YGGDRASIL. Also—

Is this YGGDRASIL? No, it's way too different. But could it really be?

Gradually, Momonga came to realize that this could not possibly be inside a game.

But then, what about himself?

For starters, how did a body that was wholly composed of bones move around?

He had no muscles or nerves.

He was moving as though this was the kind of creature he had always been, and such a thing could only appear in games. No, when he thought about it, what about the power — the principle called “magic”?

Momonga walked down a main street. The knowledge base he had been building for himself to this day had been broken, but he still had not been able to reconstruct it.

“In any case, all I can do is to continue gathering information.”

Perhaps it was because this was a main street, but the number of wandering Zombies suddenly increased.

In order to avoid bumping into any Zombies, Momonga once again cast `<Fly>` and continued moving at a slightly higher altitude.

It would seem this was a main road for this city, because when he looked straight ahead he could see the city gates, which were wide open.

In the other direction lay a fancy-looking castle. Perhaps it was because it was constructed differently, it did not seem as badly damaged as the ruined house from before.

I'd probably spot some damage from weathering if I took a closer look. If there's weathering, then would it be better to assume this city's been abandoned for a long time... don't tell me the people of this otherworld (I guess I have to think of it as another world) can't even defeat Zombies? Or is it like one of those commonly-seen zombie movie tropes where all the living have died off?

Could it be that they could not even defeat Zombies, the weakest of all undead in YGGDRASIL? Or was this place different from YGGDRASIL in that the Zombies here were extremely powerful?

He had to answer these two questions as soon as possible.

Just as Momonga was pondering the Zombie apocalypse which had taken in this city and how it might have come about, Momonga picked up a reaction.

“What?”

Among the massed undead reactions around him, one of them was gradually drawing away from him.

...What's this?

Momonga narrowed his eyes.

He could sense a certain degree of intelligence from that action, a quality that Zombies did not possess.

“Is that a player? I won't let you get away, you source of information!”

He floated lightly into the air. Given the other party's complete lack of hesitation as they moved, they ought to be quite familiar with the layout of the city. However, terrain was meaningless to someone who could cast <Fly>.

As Momonga flew in a straight line through the air, he caught sight of someone's form.

The small figure in a hooded cloak turned back several times — back at the place where Momonga had been — as it sprinted down the narrow alleys.

I'll use undead domination — no, that's a last resort. And besides, I might not be able to dominate it.

Undead domination was considered an offensive act. If the figure before him was connected to those Zombies, it was very likely that he would wind up aggroing all the Zombies in the city. While he would not need to worry about that if the figure was a player, he would probably wind up making a more dangerous enemy instead.

Momonga landed in front of the figure. Said figure just so happened to be looking back at that moment and collided with Momonga. It was a light impact, and it meant nothing to Momonga.

He could vaguely make out blonde hair underneath the hood.

“...Good evening. It really is a starry night tonight...”

“Eeee...”

The figure did not answer Momonga's greeting. All he could hear was a sudden intake of breath.

Were they unable to speak, or did they not understand Japanese? Without enough information to draw a conclusion, Momonga continued speaking.

“I apologize for this, but I am quite confused right now. I have several questions for you. Would you mind answering them?”

The other party might be a player like Momonga, which would mean that their apparent and actual age might not match up. With that point in mind, Momonga made his inquiry in a polite fashion. Of course, he did not forget to dip his head to indicate that he was making a greeting.

Momonga locked eyes with the crimson pupils beneath the hood.

Are they dressed as a child? Is this a resident of this world? Doesn't look like an NPC

either... hm?

Momonga unconsciously recalled the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick and the NPCs who had knelt before him. What had happened to them? For all he knew, he might have lost a wonderful place, one which he had built with his friends.

However — Momonga shook his head.

Right now, he did not have the leisure of contemplating such things.

Momonga studied the person before him, taking care not to look at them in a rude way.

She was a pretty young girl, probably over 10. Her eyes, widened by shock, were the crimson of fresh blood.

What he had thought was a hooded cloak was, on closer inspection, merely a piece of cloth secured with a rope. Surely only the undead would tie something so carelessly to their necks.

The clothes below the cloak were tattered from wear and discolored from where dirt and sand had gotten on it. It looked like women's clothing, but the loose sleeves were tied up by rope, and what had once been a skirt was tied up into what seemed like a pair of pants. It was an utterly utilitarian garment.

While he had no idea how his bony body could smell anything, this girl did not have the odor of decay about her, like the other Zombies. Perhaps the lack of body odor despite the dishevelled state of her clothing was because the undead lacked metabolic processes.

"...I say again, I have several things I would like to know about. I trust that will be alright? Ahhh, I apologize," Momonga said as he extended a bony hand to her. However, the girl seated on the ground showed no sign of taking it. Was she still wary of him?

"In that case, you don't mind if I ask, then?"

The girl nodded.

Momonga was mildly surprised when he saw that he could communicate normally with language. Since they could verbally interact, did that mean she was a player?

"To begin with, yes... I am... Suzuki Satoru. May I ask your name?"

The crimson pupils seemed to be shaping themselves into perfect circles.

"...Ah, uu... ah... ah..."

She spoke in a very hoarse voice. He could not make out what she was saying at all.

Is that not Japanese? Does that mean she's a resident from another world? Or no, is she a player who's way too immersed in her roleplay? I have no idea.

Momonga — no, Suzuki Satoru replied to her, taking care to affect a professional, businesslike tone.

"I sincerely apologize. It seems your voice is a little soft. Could I trouble you to repeat yourself?"

"...Ah, uu... ah... ah..."

It was the same as before, after all.

"Is your name Ahuuahah, then? What a strange name... hm?"

The girl shook her head. He could be sure of it now — she was definitely capable of understanding Japanese.

"Is it not? Then, could it be that you cannot speak?"

She shook her head once more.

The girl was trying her best to vocalize, but Suzuki Satoru could not parse any meaningful from her response.

"Then, let me change topics. Are you a player?"

A baffled expression appeared on the girl's face.

"You are not a player, then? I see. Then, your parents..."

Halfway through, Suzuki Satoru suddenly remembered that she was undead. There

was no way she could have had parents. Yet, the girl's reaction was somewhat strange.

She lowered her head, and shook it.

It was a response that suggested that she had had them once, but not any more.

What should I do?

In that case, should he just excuse himself and leave? However, she was a valuable source of information. It would be a terrible waste.

Suzuki Satoru looked at the girl making strange noises and fell into contemplation. Just then, he heard a very soft voice.

“—no —sris Inve—”

The words she was repeating had finally become distinct enough for Suzuki Satoru to understand.

“My name is Keno Fasris Invern.”

That was the girl's name.



1章 亡国の出会い

CHAPTER 1

MEETING IN THE LOST COUNTRY

1

Now then, Suzuki Satoru mused.

He had no idea what kind of person this Keno girl was. However, she was definitely an important source of information. He would need to get her to lower her guard so she would be more willing to talk.

For starters, judging by her reaction, she was not a player, but a resident of this world. While he would have liked to verify that, he had no idea how to achieve that goal.

Also, he could not tell if she was trustworthy. For all he knew, he might wind up learning fake information. Right now, he ought to be taking steps to gain her trust.

With those thoughts in mind, Suzuki Satoru began by putting on a businessman's smile, but then he realized that he could not do so in his present state. Therefore, he tried to soften his tone. While his voice was hardly saccharine sweet, he tried to speak in as gentle a way as possible.

"Ah... I... while I gave you my name just now, let's start again. I am Suzuki Satoru."

"Satoru... sama?"

Suzuki Satoru could not help but widen his eyes — though in this body, it looked as though fires had ignited in his eye sockets. He had not expected her to immediately go to addressing him by name. *She's being very familiar,* Suzuki Satoru mused. *And she gave her name too. I'd better remember that. She must have done what she did to highlight that point.*

"-San will do. Now then... you're Keno-san, am I right?"

Now it was the girl's turn to goggle her eyes. Suzuki Satoru wondered if he had said

something inappropriate.

Keno Fasris Invern.

Keno ought to be her given name and Invern was probably her surname. Or was it Fasris-Invern? While he was not sure which was which, the surprised look on her face was probably because she had addressed him by his name, but Suzuki Satoru had used her surname instead. Perhaps she had thought it was a rejection of her good intentions.

Or was it because he had appended the honorific of -san to her name, despite her being a child?

“Ah, y-yes...”

“In that case, please stand up. And then — speaking here is a little... what do you call it. Well, yes. I could create a tower with magic... but that would be taller than the surrounding buildings. While I also have items with similar abilities... you don’t want to stand out too much, do you?”

Keno had barely managed to get to her feet after Suzuki Satoru had pulled her up, and she timidly nodded.

I see — Suzuki Satoru did the mental equivalent of narrowing his eyes.

That would mean Keno knew about magic items. Was this common knowledge for this world’s residents, or was it professional knowledge that only she had? Or was she someone connected to YGGDRASIL after all?

Still, he felt that there was something wrong in trying to look for some kind of commonplace trait in an undead girl that he had found in a city crawling with Zombies.

And as for why she wanted to avoid attention — was it because there were other intelligent undead in this city apart from the Zombies, or was it because there were hostile beings around and this place was not safe? That sounded more like it.

“In that case, if you know of a safe place, could you take me there?”

Keno’s body trembled.

He could understand how she felt.

In Suzuki Satoru's case, he would not want to lead someone who might be a PK — in this case, a suspicious-looking skeleton — to his secure shelter. Therefore, he ought to take a step back and settle for going to a place where they could talk in peace. Could it be that Keno did not have a backup hideout?

It would be easy to say "You're not being careful enough," but since he did not know what Keno had gone through, he did not have the right to say something like that. Even Suzuki Satoru would not have continued playing YGGDRASIL if he had not met other friends. In other words, a person's actions were based on their experiences and past. Perhaps Keno had no need to be that cautious in her daily life.

Suzuki spoke to her as a YGGDRASIL player addressing an inexperienced newbie.

"I don't need you to take me to your main base. Do you know of any other places that you consider safe? Like say, nearby houses or something?"

Truth to be told, he did want to know where her base of operations was. But Suzuki Satoru was filled with the moral obligation of a hoary veteran giving advice to a rookie, and so he suggested a sincere alternative.

Also, Keno might not be the only one in that base. Or was that place as important to her as Satoru's friends were to him? Suzuki Satoru could fully understand the feeling of not wanting to endanger his friends.

"If you can't decide by yourself, then I don't mind you coming back after you talk to your supervisor. In that case, I'll wait nearby... where there aren't any undead."

While he did not want to let her escape, neither did he want to stalk her and pump her for information. Letting her trust him was not a bad thing, Suzuki Satoru magnanimously declared in his heart as his sense of duty as a high-level player came to the fore again.

Keno walked off in a timid, retiring fashion.

"Thank you very much, Keno-san."

Keno's shoulders twitched as she heard Suzuki Satoru say those words from behind her. Then, she hurriedly turned to look at him.

“Hm? What, what’s the matter?”

“Ah, no, it’s n-nothing...”

Keno muttered quietly and walked off.

What’s going on? Suzuki Satoru wondered. Was she just being cautious, or was it because he really was that frightening?

In fact, Keno had been spying on the Zombies from a narrow alley, even though she was undead herself. Should he assume that they had been enemies once?

In that case, what kind of undead being was she?

There were many kinds of undead creatures — even Suzuki Satoru, to some extent — who had red eyes. However, very few of them looked as presentable as Keno. While the words Vampire Bride came to mind, she did not feel like she was one of them.

It was at this moment that Suzuki Satoru was struck dumb by his sheer ignorance.

If this really was another world, then it was entirely possible that it might contain undead which were unique to it. However, he could not say that it was completely unconnected to YGGDRASIL. Otherwise, there would be no way to explain why Momonga could use his skills and YGGDRASIL’s spells.

Suzuki Satoru abandoned further thought into the matter. After all, given how little he knew right now, no amount of thinking would give him an answer.

Fortunately, the two of them did not encounter any Zombies as they walked in silence for several minutes. Keno stopped as she reached the vicinity of the city walls. There was a small single-story building there, with stairs leading downwards. The arch along the way had a cross-hatched grating set into it.

What’s this? If it leads to an underground cellar then shouldn’t it be located inside the building? Is it an underground aqueduct? Or no, should I call it a sewer?

Keno turned her head.

“Ah, this is, the place.”

Her eyes were downcast, as though she was ashamed of how shabby her living quarters were.

It was true that it was hardly a place where a girl ought to be staying. However, it would seem runaway kids in Suzuki Satoru's world also lived in similar places.

"I see. I hear temperature changes underground are much less extreme than on the surface. You picked a good spot."

Most undead had very high resistance to the cold, and temperature drops should not have inconvenienced them. Therefore, Suzuki Satoru had agonized for a while before finally delivering a clumsy acknowledgement of her words.

"Does anyone else live here besides you?"

Keno gently nodded in response to Suzuki Satoru's question.

"I see... please lead the way, then."

Keno pushed the metal grate aside. She did not seem to have used undead strength or any particular ability or spell; it had simply been unlocked. And the fact that she knew it would be unlocked was also proof that she treated this place as her base of operations.

Keno continued down the stairs ahead of her.

Although the moonlight swiftly faded away, it did not cause any impairment to the two of them. After all, the undead all possessed the ability of darkvision.

They reached the foot of the stairs, and it would seem this really was a sewer. However, Suzuki Satoru realized along the way that there was no stench of sewage here. In fact, there was no running water at all, only a slightly damp feeling in the air.

Perhaps this was because a long time had passed since the residents of this city had become undead. While rainwater occasionally entered here, fresh sewage had not passed through this place.

That was probably why Keno did not smell of sewage despite her lair being located in the sewers.

A twinge of emotion suddenly ran through Suzuki Satoru.

The rain was acidic and foul-smelling in the era where he lived. However, Keno's body did not carry an acidic stench, which implied that the rainwater of this world was still as pure and clean as it was in the past.

"Perhaps Blue Planet-san would feel sentimental if he were here."

Keno turned around as she heard Suzuki Satoru talking to himself, and she looked at him with a timid expression on her face.

"I'm sorry, I was just talking to myself."

"Ah, oh, I understand."

As Keno's words gradually became easier to make out, Suzuki Satoru could hear the fear she held for him in them.

And I've been so nice to her all this while, Suzuki Satoru could not help but gripe. Of course, he had not forgotten the effects of his skeletal appearance. After all, first impressions were hard to change.

Just as he was considering whether or not to cover up his face, the two of them reached their destination. However, it was not because he had been thinking for a long time, but because it was not far from where they had entered the sewers.

After entering the sewers, they had travelled roughly 20 meters, turned left, and then gone another 20 meters before arriving at a door off to the side. She opened the door that looked like it was made of metal, and it creaked.

"This is, the place."

Suzuki Satoru followed Keno into the room.

It was not very spacious. This room had probably been used to store tools needed to conduct sewer repairs, and there was a pile of pickaxes and other tools in the corner.

Facing it was a somewhat dirty piece of cloth — not from stains, but from age — which had been laid on the ground.

There was also an old and plain table and chair here.

That was all this room had in the way of furniture. It did not seem suitable to living at all. One could say it was a room which lacked any form of entertainment or household items.

Although he could understand how she might be thinking, given that she was undead, Suzuki Satoru would never want to stay in such a lonely and desolate place for any length of time. Wait a minute—

A sudden surge of kinship suddenly rose up within him. When he thought about it, his home in real life was pretty much the same as this.

However, the thing in this room that drew his attention was a pile of books and scrolls. The books had characters which Suzuki Satoru had never seen before written on their spines, but the fact was that he basically knew no other languages besides Japanese.

“Do you need a light or chair?”

He took out a western-style lamp from his inventory and opened the shutters, allowing white light to pour out into the surroundings.

This was a magic item which had been imbued with <Continual Light>.

Of course, he had higher-grade magic items for illumination on hand. However, Suzuki Satoru decided that there was no need to show off anything more powerful. Now was not the time to reveal his hand. Also, one of them could radiate light that was like the sun, which would apply negative status effects to Vampires. If Keno was a Vampire, then she might judge that as a hostile action. Therefore, he could not bring that out under any circumstances.

The lamplight lit up Keno’s face, but she did not seem unduly surprised. However, he could not tell if it was because she had seen a magic item like this before, or if it was because she understood the <Continual Light> spell.

After that, Suzuki Satoru cast a Twinned <Create Greater Item> spell.

This spell had originally been intended to produce weapons, but Suzuki Satoru had a sneaking suspicion that in this world — assuming it was different from the one in which he had previously lived — this spell would have broader applications. The

results of the spell matched his predictions for it.

As he expected, a pair of black metal chairs appeared.

Keno's eyes widened like saucers as she witnessed this miraculous occurrence. Her expression was one of surprise. Suzuki Satoru addressed the girl in his most caring tone.

"Ah — these are simply a couple of petty items I created with my magic. Please sit on them as you wish."

Keno tried her best to refuse in a roundabout way, but she sat down on them in the end. It was only after she did that Suzuki Satoru took a seat, because the business etiquette of letting his client take a seat first had been thoroughly ingrained into him.

However, he realized he had made a mistake right after sitting down.

The metallic sensation under his butt was very uncomfortable for something that was supposed to be a chair, but he had not learned any spells that would let him conjure cushions.

Earlier, he had thought that taking a seat by himself was terribly rude, which was why he had conjured two chairs. As he thought about how he had coaxed her into sitting down on that cold hard chair, he felt so ashamed that he wanted to find a hole and crawl into it.

The sole saving grace now was that he had not begun by saying the chairs in the room looked pretty good or some other kind of hollow pleasantries. If he had really said that, it probably would have ruined any kind of relationship he wanted to build between himself and Keno.

Suzuki Satoru hurriedly produced a robe from his inventory, one that felt soft enough, and began folding it up as he spoke.

"I'm terribly sorry. This chair really is too hard. Please use this as a cushion"

Keno stared in dumb surprise at the robe which Suzuki Satoru had offered her, and then she vigorously shook her head.

"Eh, but, how could I, such fine clothes like these, there's no need. I, I have a, blanket

that I, normally use.”

“No no, no need to stand on ceremony, it’s a small thing”

The robe might have looked fancy, but that was all. It was an item that did not contain any rare data crystals.

And so, another intense exchange of Suzuki Satoru and Keno giving way to each other unfolded. In the end, Keno gingerly accepted Suzuki Satoru’s good intentions and planted her petite posterior on the folded robe.

“Now then, please excuse me for getting straight to the point. I’d like you to tell me what happened to this city to the best of your ability, Keno-san. Of course, I have no intention of making this a one- sided interaction. I will show you proof of my own sincerity as well. That said, while I would normally be exchanging information of equal value with you, I regret to say that I know very little about the situation, so I intend to pay you with magic items or hard currency instead. May I know how you feel about that arrangement?”

Keno bit her lip, and then glared at Suzuki Satoru with what looked to be hatred in her eyes.

Suzuki Satoru could not help his surprise.

He had not expected such a response from her.

However, before he could ask her for the reason why, Keno looked to the ground and began speaking in a weak and trembling voice.

2

Behind her tightly-closed eyelids — through the double barrier of the curtains and the thin silks which served as her bed’s canopy — she could feel the rays of the sun shining down on her. “Good morning, time to get up,” and “Let me sleep a while longer” — these two parts of her shouted back and forth in their struggle to seize control of her body.

Just as she was drifting in and out of slumber, the room door opened quietly and someone entered. While the thick carpet covering the floor muffled their footsteps,

she could still sense someone moving through the room.

This person walked over to the side of her bed, and stopped.

“Good morning, Keno-sama. Today’s weather is good too.”

“Uuu, mmm, mhmm...”

Her eyes opened ever so reluctantly, and the familiar smile of the maid Nastasha came into view.

The fact that she had been permitted to address Keno, the princess of this country, by her given name was because she was Keno’s handmaiden.

Nastasha was one of the more highly-placed servants in the castle, and in her youth there had been rumors that she would become the next head maid. Her abilities were exceptional and she even had in-depth magical training; one could say that it had been smooth sailing all the way to her present station.

It was precisely because Keno was her father’s only daughter that she was permitted to stand by Keno’s side — such was a sign of the favor she had received. However, Keno felt that she would probably not wind up as the head maid, because she would probably end up becoming the first wife of some noble and then resign her position.

Seeing that Keno had already risen, Nastasha went over to the window and forcefully opened it. Just as she had described earlier, the room was filled with blinding sunlight.

Having just departed sweet dreamland, her eyes were painfully seared by the light and she could not help squeezing them shut again. Only after her eyes had gradually gotten used to the sunlight through her eyelids did Keno slowly open them once again.

The warm sunlight poured into the room, as if to tell her that today would be a peaceful, wonderful day filled with warmth.

“Alright, Keno-sama. I shall prepare water for you right away.”

There was an empty silver basin on the small round table. After Nastasha cast a spell on it, the basin was promptly filled with clean water.

Nastasha had just cast a first-tier lifestyle spell — also known as the lifestyle spell

tradition — known as <Create Water>. While zero-tier spells could also create drinkable water, the water created by this spell tasted better.

Since they both used the same amount of mana, popular opinion held that better-tasting water was superior, even if it had not been created for drinking purposes. It would seem Nastasha felt the same way too.

As a first-tier spell, the water generated by <Create Water> was not limited to just filling a single basin. While there was a time limit to it, the overall volume of water created — which would increase along with the caster's skills — could be parcelled out over multiple occasions. Therefore, there would be no spillage and waste even if she cast the spell on the basin.

Incidentally, Nastasha was a magic caster who had attained the second tier. On cold days, she could use the second-tier lifestyle spell <Temperature Change> to alter the temperature of the water until it was comfortable, or to directly heat the room.

Keno had read from a book that there was a third-tier lifestyle spell called <Hot Spring>. Apparently it was an imitation of the druid spell <Geyser>. The book's author had written, "It feels really good," and so Keno wanted to personally try it once.

Unfortunately, none of the maids in the castle could cast such a high-tier lifestyle spell. Therefore Keno could only read about the effects of <Hot Spring> from her books.

While there were magic casters in the castle who could cast third-tier spells, those people typically studied battle spells and did not have the time to learn lifestyle magic on top of that.

"In that case, I'll just learn it myself!" Keno had once told the people around her — specifically her magic instructors. Back then, Keno had been younger than she was now, at an age where she could barely cast first-tier spells. It would not be unusual for someone hearing a young girl like that saying that she wanted to cast a third-tier spell — which was typically the province of the naturally gifted — to regard it as the naive declarations of a child.

That is, if that child was not Keno.

Keno's parents — her father could cast fourth-tier spells, while her mother could go even further and cast fifth-tier spells — were genius magic casters of extraordinary talent. Thus, as the scion of both their bloodlines, everyone believed that it was very

likely that she could make good on her words.

Therefore, two hours after making that statement, she had been summoned before her father and sternly rebuked. There was a limit to how many spells everyone could learn, and as royalty, she ought to learn more useful spells.

The young Keno had retorted that it was precisely because she was royalty that she should not learn offensive, defensive, or divinatory spells, and instead learn spells that would make everyone happy.

However, her father had said this: "Our country is not a peaceful one. There's no telling when these quiet, peaceful days will come to an end and a king must personally go to the battlefield. Therefore, anyone with the potential to become an exceptional magic caster should learn battle-effective spells."

After hearing her father's answer, Keno abandoned her plans to learn <Hot Spring>.

Her father's words had been well-reasoned, and she was not yet old enough to fully understand what he meant by them. On the one hand, she lacked the courage to resist her stern father, and on the other, she was not particularly obsessed in her pursuit of hot springs.

Rather, it was because her father spoke in a kingly way, which reminded her of the stories of heroic adventure that Natasha had once read to her. He sounded just like them, and it left a deep impression in her heart.

From that day on, Keno made a wish that she kept secret from everyone else, that she would become strong one day, like the heroes in the storybooks — or like her father — and fight gallantly for the people.

The girl who held that dream in her heart got off the bed, walked to Natasha's side, and began washing her face. The splashing water spattered her surroundings, but she did not mind it.

The temperature-adjusted water — made by <Create Water>, which could be freely deposited within a certain radius according to the caster's will — washed away Keno's sleepiness.

Keno used the towel Natasha handed her to wipe her face clean and began brushing her teeth. Then she gargled the water in her glass, rinsed her mouth, and spat it out

into the basin.

After seeing Keno do all this, Nastasha cast *<Destruction Water>*.

The water in the basin, as well as the water that had splashed out of it, vanished as though they had been an illusion.

This first-tier spell was not lifestyle magic, but belonged to one of the four great traditions — also known as the elemental traditions — and could be used for offensive purposes.

It did less damage when used against living beings than other spells of the same tier. However, it could do significant damage to Water Elementals and other creatures closely aligned with the element of water. Higher-level versions of the third tier could also affect Slimes to some extent. The fourth-tier spell *<Dehydration>* could do great damage to all living beings.

The lower-tier versions of these spells were typically used to eliminate water in this fashion.

After rinsing her mouth, Keno walked over to the changing mirror which was roughly as tall as she was and quickly changed into the clothes Nastasha handed her.

While certain nobles would even let their vassals handle dressing them, Keno's family insisted on them changing on their own. It was a family rule to help them prepare for battle, so they could put on armor by themselves — never mind that full plate armor needed the help of squires to don.

However, it was perfectly acceptable to let others help comb her hair while she was changing. After wetting her curled hair with *<Create Water>*, Nastasha pressed it down with a moistened towel. Once Nastasha let go, the hair was straightened out.

And so, Keno Fasris Invern — the sole daughter of King Fasris — took shape.

The familiar image of herself she saw reflected in the mirror was a girl with eyes that reflected all the colors of the rainbow.

These rainbow eyes were not unique to Keno. The maid who was staring at Keno while carrying out the final checks, Nastasha, also possessed them. They were called the Rainbow Eyes, and there were a common sight in the country of the Rainbow-Eyed

People. Rather, it was the people who did not possess them that were a rarity.

“Now then, please proceed to the dining room, Keno-sama.”

“...Are both of them there today?”

“Yes. Both of them are waiting for you, Keno-sama.”

To Keno, mealtimes were joyful occasions, but also ones which weighed on her.

—Because she could see her father then.

Her father was frequently out on business — both in the Royal Capital and other cities — due to his eagerness to work. Even his daughter Keno would have many days when she would not get to see him at all. Therefore, she was very happy to meet her father. However, Keno’s father was very harsh on her, so he usually scolded her whenever they met, which made her uneasy.

That said, she could not run away from it.

Trailing Natasha in her wake, Keno walked to the dining room.

Just as Natasha had said, her parents were waiting for her within the dining room. Naturally, their maids were also present. In particular, the head maid and assistant head maid were standing behind her father and mother.

Keno’s mother had a warm, gentle look on her face — truth be told, her personality was much the same, and Keno had few memories of ever being scolded by her — and she was also a top-class magic caster of this nation, even though one could not tell just by her looks.

Her father, on the other hand, was the opposite.

Rainbow-Eyed people tended to be slender of frame and gifted in the four elemental traditions, which would lead them to enter the appropriate magic-using professions. Therefore, they were focused on spellcasting ability rather than physical abilities, and tended to lack muscular bodies. However, Keno’s father was a notable exception. Not only was he a powerful Fire Elementalist, he also possessed a brawny physique that embodied the word “powerhouse”, and his brow was deeply furrowed to go with his stern countenance.

Whether he was eating or not, he always wore a gauntlet on his left arm that was shaped to resemble a Griffin's talons.

It was the national treasure known as the Gauntlet of the Griffin Lord. It was a magic item that could summon a Griffin Lord for a total of 24 hours in the span of a week. Since the summoned Griffin Lord could be resummoned in a week's time even if it were killed, generations of kings had historically used it to call up a vanguard for them. However, Keno's father was the only one who did not use it in that way.

"Good morning, Father, Mother."

"Good morning, Keno."

In contrast to her mother's gentle greeting, her father simply furrowed his brow and nodded curtly, but that was how he usually was. Rather, if he had smiled like her mother had, Keno would be confused instead.

Nastasha pulled the chair back to let Keno take a seat, after which breakfast was served.

This country had a thriving dairy industry, and so the royal capital did not want for fresh cheese. Of particular note was the fact that it was to be expected that the dining tables of the royal household would have at least three different kinds of cheese on them. In addition, there was sour cream, drinks made from blending milk and the freshly-squeezed juices of four different fruits, and so on. Also, there were thick slices of evenly-roasted ham. The plates laden with white bread were accompanied by intoxicatingly beautiful pats of golden butter.

Keno — along with her father and mother, who were dining — looked at the ring on her right hand, but the sapphire-blue gemstone set into it did not change color.

They began to eat.

Eating was a place for etiquette. Since it had been inculcated into her ever since she had come of age, it had long since become a part of her.

As they ate in silence, her father placed his fork on the table with a quiet *clink*. She glanced over and saw that her father had picked up his napkin to wipe his mouth.

"Now then, Annie. To what degree have her magical abilities improved?"

Annie was the name of Keno's mother. She was called Annie Fasris Invern.

Annie put down her fork and wiped her mouth as well.

"My husband, currently this child seems to have gotten a feel for the second tier. Who knows, she might soon become capable of wielding its rudiments."

"I heard that a fortnight ago. In other words, there's been no improvement, am I wrong? Keno, what do you think? Do you feel stronger than before?"

Keno swallowed her food, then put down her fork and wiped her mouth like her mother had. During that time, she thought about how to answer her father, but the truth was that she did not feel much different between now and two weeks ago. It was like how nobody could sense how much they were growing every day without measuring it.

It was true that she had felt something strange when she had first become capable of casting first- tier spells. It was like gears meshing within her body. However, there had been no signs before that.

Therefore, she could only answer honestly.

"I'm not sure."

"I see. Honesty is a good policy, but that alone cannot be all. You are my first child. In the future, your younger brothers and sisters will be born, and you will have to be an example for them."

"My King... she is still young—"

“—Shut up.”

Her father coldly interrupted her mother's impending criticism.

"However young she is, she is still royalty."

The King's gaze was cutting as it turned to her. Frightened, Keno glanced pleadingly to her mother.

"She is a girl—"

“—She is more than a girl, she is a princess, she is royalty. While there is no need to outdo everyone else, being overshadowed will be troublesome. After all, you are a better magic caster than I am.”

Her father turned to look at a place without anyone and he coughed. “Which is why we got married, didn’t we,” he muttered. Then, he looked at Keno again with his steely eyes.

“For that reason, I gave this child to you so you could teach her, but you have been too lax with her education, I think. Live combat is the best form of training. While she is a child and not yet fully grown, surely she ought to start weapons training too, no? It’s important to see if she’s gifted in that field too.”

It was true that Keno’s father was inferior to her mother as a magic caster. However, given that her father was able to fight with a spear, he was the better combatant.

“I am opposed to that. According to what I have seen, I don’t think this child is like you — gifted with weapons. Until she awakens an affinity for one of the four great powers, we ought to keep on training her as a magic caster. More importantly, I forbid her to take part in anything as dangerous as live combat.”

“Back then—”

“—Things were different. Rather than learning to write with both hands—”

“—It’s faster to learn to do it with just one, I know that’s what you want to say. However, we don’t know where her talents lie. Don’t you think it would be better to let her try everything? I feel that would be better to help this child prepare for her future.”

“I agree on that point. However, I feel that it should wait until she’s at least reached the second tier first. If you want her to take part in martial instruction, then it should at least wait until her body is fully developed first.”

The two of them locked gazes, neither of them letting up.

A while later, her father looked away.

“I understand. I’ll continue leaving it in your care.”

“I am deeply grateful, my King.”

“—Keno.”

Keno jumped as she heard her father’s steely voice. Her father noticed it, but ignored it and began speaking.

“As the royal family of this country, we enjoy luxurious lives, and the loyalty of many people. And all that is because we have done our duty as the nation’s royalty. Therefore you must learn and absorb everything and make good use of it. It is true that our country is peaceful now. But who knows, we might be invaded some day. Therefore we need a wealthy nation and a strong army.”

“...I don’t want to invade other people.”

Her father’s face twisted slightly.

Was he angry, or was he laughing, or perhaps sad? It was a nuanced expression that was hard to make out. However, there was no severity in what he said next.

“There is no need to invade others. A strong army is a deterrent force. However, thoughtless intimidation will lead to conflict. It is the duty of a leader to gain information on other nations, strike a balance, and seek the growth of his country’s strength. Do you think military might is unnecessary?”

“No.”

Keno shook her head.

Among the many races — the Rainbow-Eyes making up 90% of this comparison — a nation of five million people was not too big. However, it was only because the surrounding countries were roughly the same size that a balance could be achieved. In the recent half century, there had not been any large-scale wars in the nearby nations either. However, that simply meant that there were no wars of conquest. When a monster with great individual power showed itself, that was when the fate of a nation would be decided — and depending on the circumstances, an alliance might need to be formed.

For example, there had been over 50,000 casualties when a Behemoth appeared, and the memory of it was still fresh in the hearts of many. Keno knew very well how important it was to gather the mighty together to deal with such opponents.

"You do not need to do everything by yourself. Gather the people you trust and borrow their strength. I am not unique in strength among the many kings of history, but even I have people that I trust."

Even if one looked through the history of the royal family, one would probably only be able to find people comparable to her father — who had been hailed as stepping into the realm of heroes — within its first generation.

"Therefore, gathering the strong and seeking strength that lies in a different direction from your own might be the right way. But what does that mean? Perhaps learning spells that make everyone happy might be one way to do it. However, this is a suggestion from your father. You cannot neglect your own strength. People feel at ease under the protection of the strong. Being a member of the royal family, is a form of strength that draws the masses to you. Naturally, such strength implies possessing charm, wealth, and authority. But if you take it to an extreme, then the king's personal power is the most easily understood strength of all — and it can better ensure your safety. After all, charm, wealth and authority can sometimes fail to ensure everyone's safety."

"Yes, Father," Keno replied.

"Good", the King replied as he picked up his fork again. In other words, it meant that he was going to continue eating. Her mother also hastened to follow and Keno began eating again as well.

After they had finished, the maids served up three light purple drinks. This was purple tea with a hint of milk added to it. It was accompanied by lightly sugared biscuits.

The three of them looked at their rings and then helped themselves.

Keno — who had a sensitive tongue — sipped the tea that had cooled down. It was only then that she realized two people were looking at her.

Had she breached some form of etiquette? Keno had no idea what was going on. However, this sort of thing happened from time to time. Keno would eat in silence but they would stare at her. It happened more often with her father, whom she rarely got to meet.

She tried glancing upward to take a look, but he did not look angry. So what on earth was going on? Keno tilted her head — or at least she did so in her heart — and drank

her purple tea. She let the tea wash away the sweet biscuity taste which lingered in her mouth. However, drinking too much would be greedy. She could not misjudge the balance between tea and biscuits.

Keno focused on feeding the biscuits and tea into her mouth in sequence, and her father's gaze left her.

“—So what else do you have planned for Keno today?”

“After this meal, we will be learning about magic in my room until lunchtime. After that, Balen-sensei will instruct her as usual.”

“I see. In that case, let me sit in on the lesson today. I’m quite interested in how Keno takes her lessons.”

Keno could not help her surprise.

This was probably the first time her father actually wanted to watch her learning.

“...Hehe.”

Her mother smiled, and the wrinkles between her father’s brows deepened.

“What’s so funny about that?”

“I was wondering why you’d say something like that all of a sudden. Heh...”

“It just occurred to me. There’s no other reason.”

“Alright, alright. Hehe... then I shall quietly await your arrival, my King.”

“There’s no need to wait for me. I don’t want to disturb Keno’s education.”

“I know. However, I still think that it’s best to select a suitor for Keno first. It’s somewhat late for a princess... even for a noble heiress. I remember I was eight back then.”

“No. You were nine.”

“Oh, is that so? I can’t believe you still remember.”

Her mother smiled, while her father frowned.

"Ahem! I know what you're trying to say. However, Keno is the only child of our bloodline. We cannot be sloppy about this. Should we not wait longer?"

"If we do not start thinking about this early on, all the good candidates will have found spouses by then. Our child will then become a leftover woman that nobody's willing to buy."

"Don't talk about buying and leftovers... Being a few years younger shouldn't be a problem, no? I will carefully consider that matter. Understand? That's all for this topic."

"Yes, yes, yes..."

You need to work hard on this, she heard her mother whisper. Her father wrinkled his brow, looked around at the maids, and then reached for the desserts.

After dessert was over, Keno returned to her own room, where she took various textbooks before heading over to her mother's room.

She knocked on the door of her mother's room, and the person who answered was her mother's personal maid, who was both the assistant head maid and the number two maid in the castle.

She entered the room and began her lesson with her mother.

Regardless of which tradition of magic one was studying, the important thing when one was starting out was to get a feel for it. Most of the people who had learned to use magic had done so through the feeling of making contact with the world. Anyone without that experience would be unable to cast spells. However, there were no teachers who could teach this part to their students in sufficient detail, and so many people stumbled here.

However, Keno had already crossed that hurdle. Therefore, she was learning about what she would need to know for future professions.

Keno's mother was a wizard, and so she focused on improving her arcane magic casting ability, while Keno had talent as a sorcerer, so the lessons she received were focused on improving her sorcerous ability.

Compared to wizards, sorcerers relied much more on feeling. Therefore, Keno's training focused on closing her eyes and using her heart to sense the waves her mother emanated when casting spells.

She did not know how much time had passed since the lesson had started.

—Suddenly, Keno felt something.

It was difficult to describe that sensation in words. However, it was more powerful than her mother, like a great wave, something that defied description.

This was a sensation she had never experienced before, and Keno could not help opening her eyes.

She saw her mother, who was surprised by her daughter suddenly opening her eyes. And at that moment—

Pain stabbed into Keno.

It was an agony she had never experienced before, which made no sense to her.

Keno collapsed to the ground amidst the pain, as though something had been ripped out of her.

It hurt so much that she could not speak. Keno could not believe anything could hurt this much in the world.

She wept tears of pain. In her tear-dimmed vision, she could see the two maids collapsed on the ground as well, their faces distorted from pain and agony. Beside her, her mother was going through the same thing as well.

Her mother's face was twisted in agony and her forehead was slick with sweat. But even so—

“<Reinforce Armor>”

Her mother cast a spell on Keno.

However, it did nothing for the pain she was feeling. It did not decrease in the slightest. Her mother should have noticed that from the expression on Keno's face.

“<Anti-Evil Protection>”

Keno grit her teeth against the pain and tried not to moan, and as she did she felt her mother cast a spell on her again. However, it did nothing for the agony racking her.

“Spi... rit? Or flesh? <Undead Form>”

As an advanced version of <Mind of Undeath>, this spell could briefly grant its target various properties of the undead, both beneficial and baneful. This spell now took effect on Keno, but even so, it did not help with her pain.

“Ooog! Just, this... girl!”

Her mother bit her lip — bright red blood immediately spurted out — and grabbed Keno’s arm. Surely Keno would have moaned from the pain since her mother had used too much force. But the full-body agonies she was experiencing were too strong and Keno did not feel the pain in her arm at all.

Her mother walked as though she were dragging Keno — no, she *was* dragging Keno — over to the door. No. It would be wrong to say that she was walking. Her mother was on all fours, desperately crawling forward.

“Uwaaaaahhhhh!”

She heard a howl of pain. The source of this deep sound that she had never heard before was Nastasha. It was completely different from her usual subdued and elegant voice. Nastasha was rolling on the ground and had reached the door.

“Uuuooooohhh!”

She roared in a thick, coarse tone, then stood up to lean against the door, grabbing the handle and pushing it open slightly. However, after just that much, Nastasha whimpered quietly and collapsed.

She did not move after that, as though she had passed out from the pain, or as though she were dead.

Her mother advanced toward the tiny gap that Nastasha had sacrificed herself to make. The pain coursing through Keno was enough to make a man faint or even die, and it was so powerful it even stole the strength to scream or cry. However her mother

was enduring that pain while still working to take her and run.

Although it had taken who knew how many minutes just to travel a few meters, her mother showed no signs of giving up.

The door opened slowly from the other side, and then stopped when it hit Nastasha's head.

Her mother grabbed Keno's hand and tightened.

Perhaps her mother believed that the culprit behind this incomprehensible deed was about to show themselves, but it was not to be.

The person who appeared before her was her father.

He looked like he had aged decades in an instant. He used his spear as a crutch as he moved in front of the two of them.

"My... king..."

"Ke — alright...?"

Her father looked like he was suffering too. Even so, he had managed to come all this way here because he was strong beyond the realms of man.

"Throughout... the city. Use... teleportation..."

"Under... stood..."

Her father's speech was broken as he withstood the tremendous pain. But Keno's mother seemed to have fully understood her father's meaning.

The desperation on her mother's face turned to terror. It was not just because of the pain afflicting her. Higher-tier spells demanded greater focus. Naturally, a spellcaster who could cast said high-level spells would typically have developed similarly potent powers of concentration. It would not be a problem under normal circumstances. But there were times where they would need to focus even in special circumstances like this.

Perhaps it was because of the pain or because she needed to focus herself for a spell,

but more sweat beaded on her mother's forehead. And then—

The spell did not go off.

"Ooogh. Not... failure. This is — interference!"

"What—"

In Keno's blurred vision, she saw her father's face shift into puzzlement as he forgot his pain. After that, the two of them moved over Keno as though they were trying to squash her flat.

It was heavy.

But Keno understood the feelings of the couple.

Keno could feel how strongly they loved her, and the tears flowing from her eyes were not because of pain.

But the agony did not change. It seemed to ignore their love, tormenting Keno with the same suffering it had from before.

It hurt so much that she lost her sense of time.

She could not even feel the weight of their bodies on her. She had lost all sensation in her body. All that remained was the ever-intensifying pain.

She should have died.

Why—

Why would—

What—

Who—

Would do such a terrible thing—

Questions kept bubbling up in her mind, but like bubbles — they burst. At the same time,

her consciousness also — just at that moment, Keno suddenly sensed herself making contact with something huge. It felt a lot like the moment when she cast a spell, but it was not the same.

That sensation was also impossible to describe in words. However, Keno could feel her father, her mother, Natasha, and all the people working in the castle.

That was all.

And with that, Keno passed out.

By the time she came to, she did not know how much time had passed.

The pain from before had vanished, as though it had all been a lie. It even made her wonder if she had been dreaming.

Keno suddenly wondered about her parents.

She shifted her vision and instantly spotted them.

Her mother and father were there. Both of them were standing in the room.

“Mo—”

Keno only managed to utter half of the word. The other half stuck in her throat and refused to be said.

That was because she saw the strangeness of her father, her mother, and the two maids. But the terror welling up in her was promptly extinguished.

Keno bit back the deeply unpleasant shift in her mood and looked at the faces of the four of them.

It was not dementia. The four of them were wobbling as they moved, as though they had lost their senses. The way they did it strongly resembled a certain kind of undead being Keno had learned about during her monster lore classes.

Keno touched her face.

—It was cold.

She checked her pulse.

—There was none.

She suspected that she might have felt at the wrong place and shifted the finger on her wrist, but no matter where she checked, she could not find a pulse.

Panicked, Keno looked around the room and found a dressing mirror. She looked at herself. At a glance it seemed as though nothing had changed. Yet there was one area which was completely different.

It was her crimson eyes.

3

"This is my — no, the story of the Red-Eyed Undead, Keno Fasris Invern. Or at least, the day when it began."

Keno had started speaking clearly at some point, and that was her summation. Her garbled speech when they had just met was probably because she had not spoken for too long. That said, as one of the undead, her body would not age, and so she would recover quickly once she started speaking.

"I see," Suzuki Satoru replied, and then Keno continued narrating her tale of what happened since that day.

After realizing that it was not just the people in the room, but the castle, and the entire city who had become mindless undead — Zombies, in other words — Keno had two paths available to her.

One was to leave this city and ask someone else for help in saving her people.

The other was to stay here and wait for help from other cities to arrive.

Evidently, Keno had chosen to stay.

While Keno did not hate the living, the undead were fundamentally beings who hated the living. How could a being like that ask the living for help? If they saw Keno, there was no doubt that they would attack with the intent of destroying her. Then, there was

the fact that even after becoming undead, Keno could not simply abandon her family and leave.

More importantly, Keno was weak and could not withstand the attacks of monsters and beasts, so the chances of her reaching a nearby city were low. In addition, she held on to a faint thread of hope that the other cities would come to investigate, given that this was the royal capital.

However — nobody came.

After one, after two years, she had not seen anyone around the city gate.

Perhaps this strange undead conversion phenomenon had spread to the nearby cities and even affected the entire country. When that thought came to mind, Keno began working in earnest, and as she waited for rescue, she studied the undead residents of her country in order to understand the undead conversion phenomenon, so that she might help everyone recover.

She had also thought “What can I do? I’m just a child,” once, but Keno had no choice.

Keno occasionally ventured out of the castle to bring back various books, which she would study. At the same time, she trained herself to use more potent spells. As one of the undead, who did not need to rest, Keno could literally work through the night in her endeavors.

Years passed, or possibly decades — it had been long enough that even her sense of time had been thrown off. It would seem Keno had lived all by herself, looking for a way to restore everyone to their original selves.

During this time, Keno had seen migratory birds which had not yet been converted to Zombies, which made her certain that there were still living beings in the outside world. However, when she observed the city gates, all she saw were the occasional corpses of animals which had been attacked by Zombies, and in the end she had not encountered any live human visitors.

After hearing Keno’s story, Suzuki Satoru finally realized why there was such a huge difference between the solemn way in which Keno spoke and her youthful appearance.

When he thought about it calmly, it was a perfectly understandable situation. Since she was undead, it was only natural that there would be a disconnect between her

apparent age and her actual time spent alive (leaving aside the matter of whether that was accurate for now). In other words, her body might not have changed, but her mind had grown. It was impossible to completely erase fear and other emotions from one's heart, and so, in the fullness of time, her mind had gradually changed as well.

That being the case, would it not be rude to treat her as a child? Suzuki Satoru thought. *I'll just wait until she makes her preference known,* he concluded. All of his life experience to date had told him that it was better to treat women as younger rather than older.

And then, her story came to an end.

Keno, who had been conducting her research in the castle, now lived in the sewers.

That was because — she had fled.

At that time, she had felt a powerful undead being appear outside the city, one that was more powerful than herself or even her parents, and it had then entered the castle. She had no faith whatsoever in her ability to triumph in battle, and so she took everything she could carry and ran from the castle to here.

And then, the events of today had taken place.

Just as she was planning to head out to retrieve some magic-related literature from the castle, she suddenly saw an incomparably powerful undead being in the air — Suzuki Satoru — and this had led to the present circumstances.

“I see...”

He now understood her current condition and the state of the city. However, he had no idea why he had appeared here, or why she and the city had ended up this way.

However, it did not seem like this world had been generated in response to Suzuki Satoru's arrival. As expected, it would be better to think that there was probably some reason — though it was unclear — that Suzuki Satoru had been brought to another world.

Speaking of which...

Suzuki Satoru stared at Keno, that undead being in the shape of a little girl.

I'm really lucky that I managed to meet someone who knew how this world worked. Doubly so that she's undead.

She had mentioned it in her story, but it was only after he had asked her about it in detail that he learned that the undead were universally reviled by the living, and it would not be unusual for them to be exterminated if found. Therefore, it would be very difficult for him to gain assistance. That would mean that Keno was a very important person.

It was true that Suzuki Satoru most wanted to know about his former friends and the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick. However, Keno knew nothing about them. That said, it did not make her worthless. After all, it was only to be expected that she would not know about them. It made more sense to think that Suzuki Satoru alone had come here and that everything else had vanished with the game.

I'd like to gain her trust and learn more about this world, if possible. At the very least, I'd like to fill in the gaps between what I know and how this world works... that might take a long time. Taking her out into the world of man would shorten that time, and I'd be able to gain experience and knowledge too... but how could I indebted her to me to such an extent?

Just as Suzuki Satoru was agonizing over that problem—

“—Everyone, everyone is important to me.”

Keno went to her knees in front of Suzuki Satoru and then bowed her head low, her palms flat on the ground.

“Please, I beg you. Please change everyone back to how they used to be.”

“—Eh?”

What exactly did she mean by that?

No, even if you say so — that was Suzuki Satoru's first reaction.

In the game YGGDRASIL, Momonga was an undead arcane magic caster. He ought to possess the same power in this incomprehensible otherworld.

However, he did not have the ability to restore the undead.

If the city's people had become Zombies because of some negative status, then perhaps killing and then resurrecting them with magic might work.

While it could not be used that way in the game, such a tactic apparently existed in other games; namely, killing someone who had gained an incurable status affliction — strictly speaking, they would be beaten into a near-death state and then resurrected, which would eliminate the negative status effect.

However, in the absence of such circumstances, none of the spells in Suzuki Satoru's repertoire included the ability to restore people who had become undead. It might sound strange, but even resurrective items and spells which could be used on undead creatures who had been reduced to 0 HP some time ago could not restore them to their state before they had become undead.

That said, race-change items might have a chance here. Unfortunately, once one became an undead creature, most race-change items would not be able to change one's undead status. If it was possible, the only things which could do that would be on the level of World-Class Items.

If one was a player, it would be quicker to delete one's character and start a new one.

While I don't have any and wouldn't use them even if I did, perhaps the "Seeds of the World Tree" could allow even the undead to freely change their race — assuming, of course, that World-Class Items had the same effect here as they did in the game. Or would using <Wish Upon A Star> allow me to change back some of them, even if it wasn't all of them?

In any case, Suzuki Satoru had no intention of expending any of his limited-use trump cards.

As Suzuki Satoru continued thinking, Keno also continued her spiel, as though she was weeping tears of blood.

"Why, why did you do this to us? I have no idea. Maybe it was my fault. I'll pay for my sins, so please spare everyone!"

"—Hm?" He had heard something he could not pretend to ignore. "I did this to you?"

Had Suzuki Satoru turned everyone in the city into undead beings without realizing it? No, he had never done such a thing before, not even in YGGDRASIL.

Confused, Suzuki Satoru stewed in silent shock. Keno raised her head a little and peeked at Suzuki Satoru.

“...Excuse me. In truth, I don’t quite understand what you’re saying. Did I do something like this?”

“—Huh?”

Much like Suzuki Satoru had done just now, Keno made a baffled sound.

“Huh?”

“Huh?”

Both of them looked at each other.

The girl froze, as though the power to her had been cut off. He waited a while, but she did not look like she planned to answer him. That being the case, Suzuki Satoru began to talk about his own side of things. Still, he could not say he was a resident of another world or whatnot, of course. Therefore, he altered his story into one where he was conducting a magical experiment and had suddenly been teleported into the air above the city.

“So, if you’ve lived in this city for a long time, I trust that means it has nothing whatsoever to do with me?”

“Ah, uh, so it wasn’t because of your power then, Satoru-sama?”

“By power, do you mean turning everyone in this city into undead creatures? No, I don’t know anything about it — ah, I really don’t, you know? Now then, can it be my turn to ask you a question? Do you have any proof or basis that I am the cause for all this?”

In truth, Suzuki Satoru’s memories had only just been awakened. If his body had been unconsciously brutalizing its surroundings until then, he would truly have nothing to say in his defense.

“...”

Her expression slowly changed, from shock to hurt.

Like a child, she could not hide the changing of her face. Even though she had lived so long — Suzuki Satoru's words had still — despite the emotional suppression of the undead — had a great impact on her.

"A-Ah, when I was alone in the city, a powerful undead creature appeared... I was scared and so I ran."

It was the undead creature that Keno had mentioned just now, the reason why she had shifted her base from the castle to this place. He had not yet heard the details about this undead being—

"—Ahhh, I see, so that undead being was very similar to me... and that's all, is that it?"

"Yes."

Keno's voice, so faint it seemed to be on the verge of disappearing, combined with the look of understanding on her face and lifted a great weight from Suzuki Satoru's heart.

It was not Momonga — without Suzuki Satoru's mind — who had done this. That made him even more certain that he had only appeared in this world at that moment. At the same time, Suzuki Satoru could not help but be surprised at the extent to which Keno believed what he said.

Of course, Suzuki Satoru had been very frank and honest with her in the hopes of gaining her acceptance. However, she was the one who would make the final decision of trusting him. In other words, she had believed the words of an undead being she had met for the first time.

If she had placed so much trust in him, then he ought to do the same for her. That was necessary for building a healthy relationship between two people.

"A-Ah, are you angry? I'm sorry — I'm so sorry I got it wrong, Satoru-sama!"

"Ahh, no need for that. Don't worry about it. Speaking of which — are you sure that undead creature is the mastermind behind the transformation of this city's people into Zombies?"

"No, I'm not sure. But I think there should be a connection, otherwise it would not have appeared at this city of the undead."

"I see, it does make a certain degree of sense."

While he had verbally agreed with her, Suzuki Satoru still had doubts in his heart.

That conjecture was full of holes.

It might have been more likely if that undead creature had appeared right away. But Keno had almost lost her sense of time by the time it had shown up — on the order of years, at the very least. Would that not mean it was very likely to be unrelated to the incident?

Also, regarding its reason for coming, surely the most likely reason would be because it wanted to take up residence here, no? As an undead being itself, it would not be attacked by low-level undead, and the living would avoid this region. If one set aside the problem of the living attacking it, would a place like this not be the most comfortable living environment for one of the undead?

However, he did not intend to tell Keno about those theories.

There was no way she could not have noticed something which even Suzuki Satoru had surmised right away.

It was very likely that she was still wanted to believe that said undead creature was the mastermind behind all this. That was why she had apologized to Suzuki Satoru for mistaking him for that entity.

She still wanted to believe that there was a way to save everyone.

Suzuki Satoru looked through the stacks of books in the room. All of them were stained, which was a sign of her hard work. However, she had probably clung to such a belief because she understood that she could not save them, or because her research had not shown her a way to do so.

Her narration of what happened that day was very detailed.

The first half of her story, her description of the day's events, was very specific and she had clearly illustrated the situation, even going so far as to include her own feelings at the time. In contrast, the latter half of her story — after she had become undead — seemed to blend together. Perhaps to her, there had been little change in the days after that, so there was little for her to talk about.

But of course they would be different.

The last time she was human was during breakfast.

Those were the most brilliant memories she had, which was why she could speak of them at such length and in such detail.

Suzuki Satoru stroked the Staff of Ainz Ooal Gown. He heard Keno gasp in surprise, but he did not mind.

He felt a hard coldness.

Yes, that's how it is.

He could understand how Keno felt.

Keno felt the same way about the city which contained her parents and which had helped raise her as Suzuki Satoru did about the guild Ainz Ooal Gown. If there was someone who could help Suzuki Satoru return to those brilliant days, he would gladly prostrate himself before them and beg for their help.

The feeling which rose up in him was called guilt.

It was simple enough to say that she was wrong for expecting so much out of Suzuki Satoru.

However—

“Ahh, yes,” Suzuki Satoru said as he squeezed his staff. “—Keno-san.”

He saw Keno’s shoulders twitch, but Suzuki Satoru ignored it and continued speaking.

“If destroying that undead creature will reverse the transformation of the people in the city, then I will gladly assist you.”

Suzuki Satoru’s earlier theory had been based purely in his knowledge of YGGDRASIL. If that undead being really was the culprit, then it might be possible to restore the people by defeating him or using some other means.

If every living thing in a city had turned undead, then one could not conclude “Who

could have done this?"

"If it is as you believe, Keno-san, and the opposition is someone who can turn an entire city of people undead, then surely they will not be easy enemies. For that reason, I feel that capturing them in one piece will be difficult, but annihilating them might still be possible."

As Suzuki Satoru told Keno that, he mentally chided himself, *Are you a moron?*

At best, an undead being similar to Suzuki Satoru would be an Overlord™. If all of his YGGDRASIL knowledge was applicable, he might be able to think of a way to deal with them. However, in this world it was entirely possible that the local equivalent of an Overlord was a Level 1000+ opponent.

That said, it would seem it was not likely that this opponent would surpass Suzuki Satoru's expectations.

The reason for that was because of the way Keno described her parents. Her father, heralded in song and story, was able to cast fourth-tier spells, while her mother, who could cast fifth-tier spells, was considered a genius. From that point of view, there was little change with YGGDRASIL, or rather, there were more weaklings here than in YGGDRASIL.

That said, whether he could beat them remained to be seen.

His self-mockery had been directed at the foolish words he said after he had equated experience at a game to real-life combat experience, in addition to his lack of knowledge.

If possible, he would like to take Keno away from this city for a while and contact people in this world who were familiar with the undead, in order to gain as much information on his foe as possible before preparing a flawless strategy with which to challenge his adversary.

For starters, he did not know the power of his opposition. Perhaps Keno had only seen the one undead creature, but it might have continued improving its fighting strength within the city after that.

In that case, his first priority was to collect information, and then — he would need to spend a lot of time and effort on preparations.

However, he did not think Keno would accept that idea. Surely a girl who refused to leave a city full of the terrifying undead would not accept a simple “Let’s get out of here,” from a third party that easily. Still, it was worth a try.

“However, I would like you to think carefully about this. Is it really alright to destroy it? It’s possible that even if you destroy that undead creature, the townsfolk might not return to normal, no?”

Keno shook her head and pulled out a book from the piles of literature.

The books stacked on top of it collapsed and fell, but she brought it back without a second glance and opened a page to show Suzuki Satoru.

His first thought was — *it's not Japanese after all.*

As Suzuki Satoru fumbled for a magic item, Keno pointed to a passage in the book and read it out.

“This part says that resurrecting a slain undead creature requires extremely powerful resurrection spells, and even after resurrection they will still be undead. But if the master undead is wiped out, the possibility exists that his victims may be restored, if they are lucky. That’s what’s written here.”

For the most part, this was the same as YGGDRASIL. However, in order for a YGGDRASIL character who had become undead to become a human again, they would need a World-Class Item, while it was not so in this world. The more he realized the differences between both worlds, the more Keno’s importance grew.

Dammit, Suzuki Satoru thought.

If Keno had answered, “Maybe they might not turn back,” Suzuki Satoru could have guided the conversation to “Then let’s not destroy it first and find another way. Since we don’t know enough, why don’t we leave this city for a while and head outside to gather information?” That was how he had planned it.

That plan had gone awry. Still, it could not be helped.

In that case, he would just have to destroy it.

Destroy that undead being.

Of course—

—*Only if I can manage it.*

“I understand. In that case — ahhh, yes, there has to be payment.”

“Yes.”

“And the payment shall be — I want to know all sorts of things. I want to know everything you know.”

The look on Keno’s face seemed to say “Huh?”

“Will you be satisfied with that?”

“Yes. I feel that the knowledge you have stored up until now is very valuable.”

Suzuki Satoru turned his eyes from the book Keno was holding to the stacks of other books in this room. What he wanted was basic information about the world, but Keno would probably be disturbed if he said as much. Therefore, he had feigned an attitude which would make her mistakenly believe he was looking for magical knowledge. Given Keno’s reaction, she had completely bought it.

“A-Alright, but all that knowledge couldn’t save everyone, you know?” “It’s fine. Even if that’s the case, it’s still valuable to me.”

“Nk you”, Keno muttered, and bowed to him.

“Also — any money or magic items you could spare would also be very good,” Suzuki Satoru said as he nonchalantly produced a YGGDRASIL gold coin. “Can I spend these in this country?”

Keno took the coin and spun it round and round in her hands before returning it to Suzuki Satoru.

“Yes, you can. Or at least, you could. While I don’t know exactly how much it’s worth without checking its gold content...”

“I see. Then, I’d be happy to obtain more gold coins like these which are usable in the surrounding region.”

“I, Keno Fasris Invern, do hereby swear to you that I shall pay you whatever you desire, Satoru-sama.”

Suzuki Satoru quietly sucked in a breath.

Such was Keno's regal, princess-like demeanor that it established her as superior even to the most successful salesman that Suzuki Satoru knew.

“Then, I am very grateful. Thus our compact is formed. In that case—”

In order to learn how to use his might, he would need to learn how YGGDRASIL's magic interacted with the magic of this world.

“By the way, Keno-san. I should mention that I can cast spells of the tenth tier”

“—I see.”

Keno smiled in a way that seemed mildly distressed.

Why, why is she smiling like that?... Aren't you considered a genius if you can cast fifth-tier spells? I've gone and doubled that, you know! Why are you so calm — is it because she's undead?

After becoming undead, Suzuki Satoru had experienced how his emotions would be suppressed once they reached a certain threshold. Did the same thing apply to Keno as well?

Don't tell me tenth-tier spells are nothing much? What if the tiers start at ten and get more powerful as the numbers grow smaller? Wait, wouldn't that make me a first-tier caster?

“Ah... is there a third-tier spell called <Fireball>?”

“Huh? Yes. there is such a spell, although I don't know how to use it.”

“Your parents were able to cast fourth and fifth-tier spells, so they shouldn't have problems casting it, right?”

“Mother might not have learned it, but my father could cast it.”

“I see. Incidentally, the spell <Lightning> is also of the third tier, right?”

Keno indicated that this was so.

So it would seem spells in this world occupied the same tiers as YGGDRASIL. In other words, Suzuki Satoru’s knowledge of magic could be directly applied.

This was excellent news, but he had to verify it.

“In that case, Keno-san, could you cast one of your spells — how about this, could you cast a first- tier spell on me? An attack spell would be best.”

“Ehhhh!?”

It was only when he saw Keno’s wide eyes that he realised he had not explained in sufficient detail.

“Ahhh. I would like to see if my powers are functioning as normal. I would like to use your attack spells as an indicator, Keno-san.”

After all, it would be troublesome they were only similar in name and tier but completely different in effects and destructive power.

“Eh, ah, I see. I understand.”

Keno gathered up her determination and stood up, then faced Suzuki Satoru.

Her lack of hesitation gave Suzuki Satoru the chills. Surely most people would waver for a moment or be disturbed, would they not?

Was that an undead trait too? As he was contemplating that question, Keno cast her spell. A brace of <Magic Arrows> lanced out at him with the same special effects as in YGGDRASIL. And then — they vanished in the instant they touched Suzuki Satoru’s body.

“Ehhhh!?” Keno exclaimed in surprise.

Suzuki Satoru — no, Momonga possessed an ability known as High-Tier Magic Immunity. It was a power that nullified all spells of the sixth-tier and below. While it was in effect, a mere first-tier spell was completely useless.

"It seems the power that protects me is functioning without any problems. Now then, try again. This time, I will lower my defenses."

He deactivated the passive skill. For some reason he felt like he was naked under the barrel of a gun.

A guild member had once said that he felt afraid to have a gun pointed at him even when he had implanted subdermal bulletproof fibers. He could understand how they felt now. While the powerful emotions of the undead would be suppressed, it would seem emotions that did not reach that threshold would be left untouched.

"I understand," Keno said, and once again, she cast her spell at him without a moment's hesitation.

"<Magic Arrow>."

The bolts of light lanced out again and struck Satoru dead center.

It did not hurt. No, there was something that might have been pain, but actually calling it pain would have disgraced the word.

Were his senses dulled because he was undead? But when he thought about it, he wanted to scoff at how a body made solely of bones without flesh, nerves, or even skin, could feel pain in the first place. On that note, how the hell did a body without vocal cords or lungs even manage to speak?

It was the same way for Keno, who did not breathe. That was just how things worked, and he had no choice but to accept them.

He peeked at her, and in the end, Keno's face — even after attacking Suzuki Satoru twice — was calm. Rather, her expression seemed to say that she had expected this all along.

What's with her...

How could she attack her helper, Suzuki Satoru, with no hesitation whatsoever? Was it because she was a psychopath, or because she was undead, or was this just the way this world worked? Countless possibilities swept through his mind.

Don't tell me... she felt that it was a chance to kill me? Or no, was it because she was

thinking, if you die, that's all there is to you, something ruthless like that?

The matter of whether he was strong enough to be her collaborator must have been very important to Keno. That was why she could attack him with no hesitation whatsoever.

Still, I am an ally of hers... so I figured a bit of hesitation ought to be expected... oh well.

No amount of thinking would give him an answer. He would just have to regard her as a creepy little girl for now. He could not allow himself to be taken in by her youthful appearance and pretty face. She was a girl who had something dangerous inside her.

In any case, he now knew that engaging in combat without performing more experiments was a very dangerous thing. If this world was different from YGGDRASIL and death was a final ending, then he needed to know what it felt like to take damage — to be in pain. A fear of pain in battle might lead to him losing a fight that he could have won.

“Keno-san, you said you could use second-tier spells in the past, but what about now? Is the second tier still your best?”

“Yes... I focused on broadening my knowledge rather than improving my spellcasting abilities, so...”

“I see. That means...”

While Keno’s level and ability scores were unknown, no matter how she tried to attack with the second-tier spells that she knew, she would not be able to cause him any pain compared to the attack spells employed by his foe — estimated to be on the level of an Overlord. She was completely useless for that purpose.

“In that case, I apologize, but I still wish to continue my tests. I need to use attack spells centered on myself. Therefore, can you tell me if there are any open areas where doing so will be relatively safe?”

Suzuki Satoru’s own spells ought to be able to do some degree of damage to him. In addition, there was one thing he had to clarify.

That was to see if friendly fire was in effect. His fighting style would change depending on whether the answer was yes or no. Things like how to use area-effect spells and so

on.

"An open space, you say? How big does it have to be? The biggest space I know of in the sewers is... yes, around 50 meters across."

"50 meters, huh..."

He would have to avoid spells with area-effect knockback and spells which were exceptionally effective against walls and other objects. Only then would such a size be considered adequate.

It would have been wiser to teleport outside the city and carry out his tests. However, he had not expected the situation to end up like this, so he had not memorized any teleport destinations outside the city.

In YGGDRASIL, one would leave a marker, but in this world it would seem one memorized the location instead.

What was the state of the inside of his head after knowing this? Speaking of which, did he even have a brain in this body? As he began contemplating this digression, Satoru shook his head and banished this useless topic from his mind before answering Keno.

"Hmm. I see. Could you take me there?"

The place he had been taken to was indeed quite spacious. It was probably a central collection tank for sewage flowing through the main trunk and branch sewer lines. However, it was empty now, save for marks left over from decades ago.

He activated his ability to check for the presence of Zombies.

It would be troublesome if there were zombie rats or the like around. If they got killed during the experiment, he might end up aggroing all the Zombies in the city.

Incidentally, there were no such things as slime Zombies. While every race could be turned into Zombies or skeletons, there were certain exceptions. Races without a skeletal system could not be zombified or skeletonized. That was how it worked in YGGDRASIL, and after checking with Keno, that was how it worked in this world too.

After finishing his checks, he stole a glance at Keno, who had remained in a higher place.

She showed no signs of fleeing. Was it because she trusted him, or because she felt she was useful, or because she felt that there was no point in escaping?

—*Let's begin, then.*

“<Call Greater Thunder>!”

This ninth-tier spell was the highest-tiered single-target lightning spell. While a flame-type spell would have worked just as well, he was mildly afraid of fire — it was one of his weaknesses, after all — which was why he had chosen this spell instead. Of course, he could have used something weaker, like a fifth-tier spell or something, but he had chosen a high-tier spell because he wanted to know how much damage a ninth-tier spell would do to him, as well as how much it would hurt.

Also, this was one of the spells that an Overlord would commonly use, and he also wanted to see if he could direct single-target spells against himself.

A thick pillar of lightning coursed down, illuminating the interior of the sewer with a dazzling light.

And then — while he felt pain, Suzuki Satoru also realised that this pain was not unendurable.

His sense of pain seemed to be suppressed as well. Was that an effect of being converted into an undead being too?

Suzuki Satoru could not help but laugh.

While gaining an undead body had shocked Suzuki Satoru a little, it was because he had such a body that he could bring forth his full abilities.

If he still had his fleshy body that could feel pain normally, surely Suzuki Satoru would have feared battle more, and he might even have chosen to avoid fighting.

Following that, Suzuki Satoru took out a scroll from his inventory. He had to check if he could use scrolls normally.

He unleashed the power contained within the scroll, and scorching flames charged skywards.

It was <Napalm>.

◊ ◊ ◊

There was a heaven-splitting stroke of thunder.

It was followed by a sky-scorching blaze.

A wave of excitement and fear washed over Keno Fasris Invern.

The words “magic caster” or “undead” were no longer sufficient to describe this. This was a power that only a being superior to both of them could employ. In other words, this magic was of the gods, or similar beings, Keno fervently believed.

The Invern royal family followed the Na Bel faith that had believers in the surrounding countries. It was a pantheon headed by the sun god Bei Niala who held a gem in his hand, and the moon goddess Lu Kinis, who wielded a jewelled staff.

Ultimately, however, it was not a belief born of an inner devotion but because it was the state religion. People other than the Rainbow-Eyed lived in this country too, and the Na Bel faith, as the state religion, was used to strengthen the bonds between the various ethnicities. One could even go further and say that they were using religion to establish ties to the surrounding nations.

Back then, Keno had been young and did not know these things, so she had believed in the gods with all her heart.

However, on that day, and every day that followed, the gods had not reached out to save them. Therefore, Keno no longer believed in the gods. However, the *power* of the gods was a different matter.

The existence of divine magic casters proved the existence of the gods’ powers. Therefore, Keno had done research to borrow, seize, or steal the power of the gods, in order to try and restore everyone to normal. However, nothing she tried had any effect — perhaps she was not talented in that field — and so she had halted her research into the topic.

After abandoning that research and years of work, as she was returning the books she had borrowed from a temple, Keno witnessed an undead being entering the city.

It was a skeletal undead, without so much as a scrap of flesh on its body, and both the robe it wore and the magic staff it held looked like powerful magic items. It radiated an aura of might found only among the strong, and it seemed to be more powerful than Keno's father.

Keno immediately fled with several books in hand.

After reaching a safe place, she began to regret what she had done. Should she not have tried to negotiate and seek salvation for her people?

Her regret had not faded since that day. *Surely it wouldn't be too late to try now, wouldn't it?* More than once, that thought had made her chest feel like it was going to burst.

But then, today had come.

In that moment, when she saw the figure floating in the night sky, Keno had fled once again. Even from a distance, she could tell his stately robes were brimming with magical power. And then, those clothes that could not possibly have been made by human hands were dwarfed by that golden staff. Its sheer presence blew away the bitter regret and determination in her heart, until nothing remained.

Keno believed that he — Suzuki Satoru — commanded overwhelming might. Therefore, when he had asked her to cast a spell, she had done so without any hesitation. She believed that her puny spells could not possibly harm him in the slightest — and indeed, that had been the case.

“Father, Mother, Natasha. There might be a way to save everyone after all.”

Keno's time until now had been wasted.

She had studied all manner of magical grimoires and conducted research, making full use of her unsleeping body to further her learning. While it had been self-taught, she ought to have possessed more knowledge than the average magic caster.

Perhaps Keno Fasris Invern would not have been able to save everyone by herself, no matter how hard she worked in this city.

But if that great man could save everyone, then as the sole surviving member of this kingdom's royalty, she would accede to any request he made, even if it meant

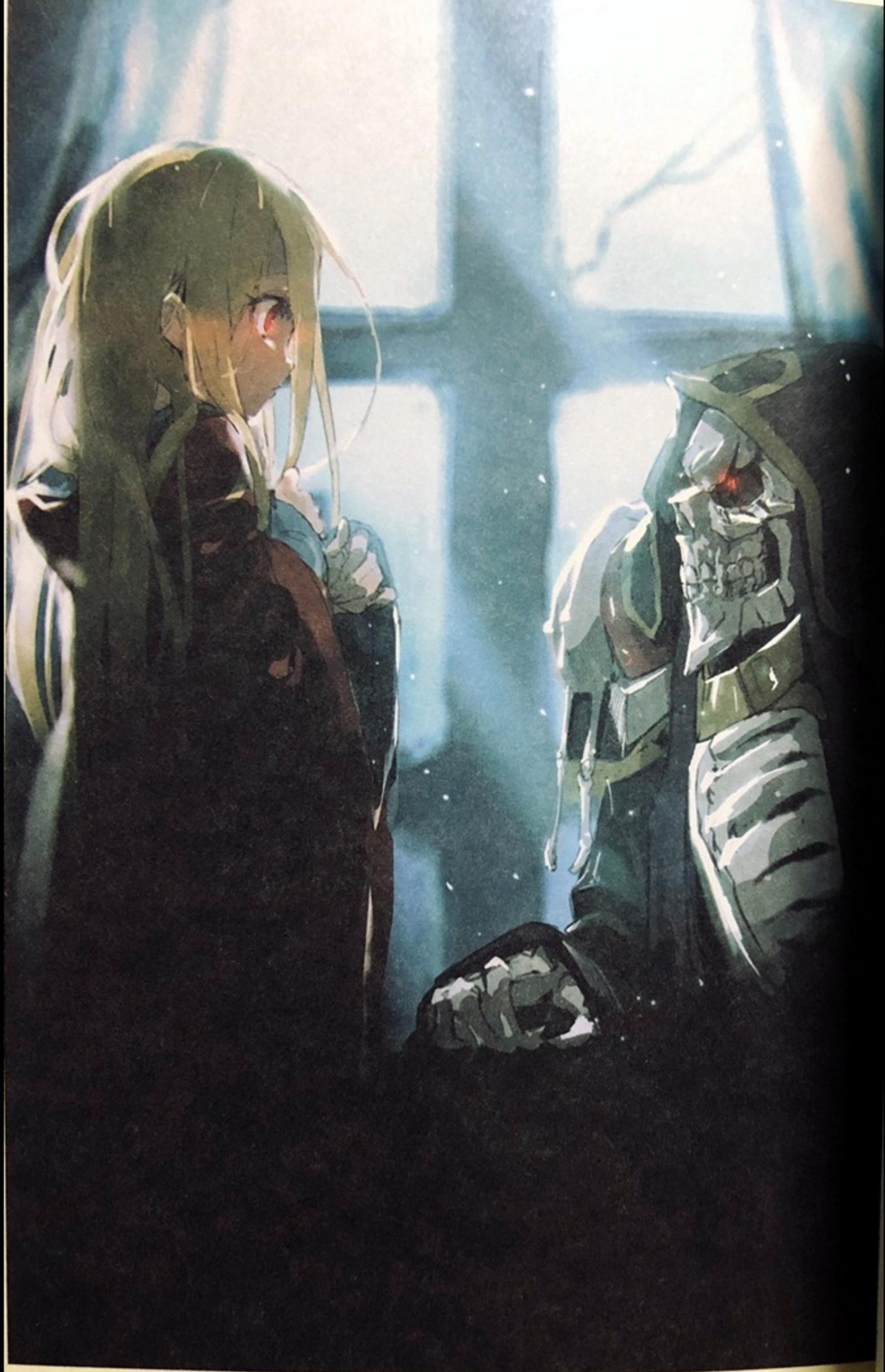
destroying herself.

Still, I don't think I have anything worthy of offering to him... did he ask for knowledge because he pitied me? I don't understand. All I can do is believe.

Keno Fasris Invern bet everything she had on that powerful undead being.

She did not know if this would end in triumph or tragedy, or if this would become a heroic saga never before seen in the world.

In any case, a new chapter began in Keno's story.



2章 二人の旅立ち

CHAPTER 2

THE TWO SET OFF

1

It had been two days since Suzuki Satoru met Keno Fasris Invern.

Suzuki Satoru had spent this time on exploring the divergences between his knowledge and abilities and this world, as well as verifying the abilities of the items he carried.

After making ample preparations one morning, the two of them arrived at the vicinity of the royal castle.

After taking shelter behind the walls of an abandoned house — it looked to have once been an opulent home belonging to some noble or other — they poked their heads out from time to time to observe the situation inside the castle.

The undead possessed darkvision. Therefore, when both the infiltrators and watchmen were undead, the night was the ally of neither side. However, certain undead — like Vampires, for instance — were weakened by sunlight, which would diminish their abilities.

If the undead being occupying the castle that they were hunting was an Overlord, then it would not be penalized by sunlight, but the same could not be said for its minions. With that in mind, they had chosen to launch their attack during the day.

The castle had not changed from when they had scouted it out yesterday. While it might still be trapped, one could not do anything when one was afraid of everything,

“Are we really going to enter from the front?”

That's the fifth time you've asked that, Suzuki Satoru thought, and then he answered her.

“That's the first step. Well, we'll probably be spotted. However, what the opposition

does at that point will be crucial. While we'll change up our own actions at that point to match our alerted opposition in the castle, it would be best to pinpoint the location of the enemy mastermind the first time around and launch an ambush to eliminate him quickly. After all, the chances of failure grow the more time passes between the first scouting and wiping out the enemy leader."

Keno knew Suzuki Satoru could use tenth-tier spells and apparently she had assumed that he would strike down his foe from the outside with some powerful spell. However, such a thing was impossible, especially if the enemy was on Suzuki Satoru's level. It would not fall to a single spell.

After that, once the master of the castle knew there was an assassin coming for him, he would probably heighten his guard. In that case, it would be very hard for Suzuki Satoru, who lacked thief skills, to infiltrate by himself.

Suzuki Satoru glanced at Keno.

She was equipped with various items she had borrowed from Suzuki Satoru. The most eye-catching example was a gauntlet that had large gems set into the back of its hand.

It was a superior piece of workmanship called the Gauntlet of Primary Colors.

It was imbued with three spells: <Body of Effulgent Beryl>, which reduced bludgeoning damage, <Body of Effulgent Heliodor>, which reduced slashing damage and <Body of Effulgent Aquamarine>, which reduced piercing damage. Thus it could be said that it lessened all physical damage taken by the wearer. Normally speaking, these three spells would overwrite each other when cast and so they would not be able to coexist, but this gauntlet stood as an exception to that rule. In addition, each spell could completely negate one instance of the damage they resisted, and this item also retained that ability.

However, this item was not as handy as it sounded.

The item would break if any of the negation abilities were used. Still, if that was all, one might still consider gathering a large amount of them and using them as disposable items. However, it also bore the extreme drawback of not being able to equip any other items to that item slot within four hours of it breaking. In addition, the activation of those abilities was not up to the wearer; rather, it would automatically activate if a certain amount of damage was taken. Frankly speaking, it would be

considered a trash item by players of Suzuki Satoru's level, and so he had around ten of them in his inventory.

There were probably at least twice that amount in Nazarick's Treasury.

He sighed as he thought about Nazarick. If only he had the various items in there, he would have more options to choose from and be able to adopt a more spell-heavy strategy.

Pathetic...

The Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick had vanished when the game ended. All that remained was the legacy of the guild, the character Momonga, the Ring, and this Staff.

"Now then," Suzuki said, and after regaining his spirits, he cast *<Summon Undead 1st>* to conjure an Animal Zombie, specifically a Dog Zombie.

Zombies moved slowly, and the Zombies of this city looked different from the Zombies that Suzuki Satoru had created. While he could not do it in YGGDRASIL, it was not impossible to disguise them with clothes. However, in the end he had still chosen a Dog Zombie for its speed.

After that, he cast *<Undeath Slave Sight>*.

This way, Suzuki Satoru could see what the Dog Zombie could see.

Wraiths were incorporeal and could pass through walls. They were thus suitable for infiltration, but he could not use *<Undeath Slave Sight>* with them. Suzuki Satoru knew that it had been possible once, but it had been patched out at some point. Perhaps the patch might not have applied to this world, so he tested it out, but in the end it did not work after all.

It would probably be best to consider that all of Suzuki Satoru's abilities were operating under the rules of the latest patches.

In that case, what would happen if Keno used *<Undeath Slave Sight>*? While the question had crossed his mind, he could not test it out because she could not cast spells of that tier. However, the magic of YGGDRASIL and this world were quite similar, so perhaps she would be using the post-patch version of the spell as well.

What on earth is with this world?

He could not believe that this was just a game world, no matter how he tried. However, neither could he believe that Suzuki Satoru had met with some accident in the real world and this was a dream he was seeing in the moment before his death.

It might be better to say he had been transported to another world — or reborn into it. Perhaps such an explanation might be closer to the truth.

Well, I don't have the time to be thinking about questions like this now, do I? If my opponent is on the level of an Overlord, then distraction might mean death for me. I need to utterly destroy him and leave him nowhere to run.

Finally, he had given it a cash item to hold in its mouth.

It was called the Exchange Puppet.

Both the distance that Suzuki Satoru had come and the fact that Keno was here had been carefully calculated with this item in mind. If he could not use this item, then there would have been no need to bring Keno at all.

With that, his preparations were complete.

He gave a mental command of “Go,” and the Dog Zombie walked forward.

Personally, he would have preferred it to run, but he had checked and confirmed that the Dog Zombies within the city did not run. For that reason, having it run would be very suspicious, and so he had ordered it to walk instead.

It leaped over a ruined portion of the castle wall and walked straight through the castle gate.

Suzuki Satoru had thought that undead minions would have shown up. He felt slightly disappointed when there were none.

According to Keno, the undead creature that had taken over the castle had not brought any minions with it when she had first seen it. However, a long time had passed since it had taken the castle, and so he should have gathered several minions to itself, most likely undead ones.

Well, I guess I'm lucky that there aren't any... although I can't be sure that there really aren't any.

<Undeath Slave Sight> took effect through the vision of the Dog Zombie. Therefore, Suzuki Satoru's ability to see through invisibility effects would not work. Thus, it was possible that there might be invisible undead around. However, he would not be able to do anything if he kept cowering from everything.

Suzuki Satoru had the Dog Zombie enter the castle. He had already learned from external observation that there were Zombies wandering throughout the castle. Since they had been protected from the weather, those Zombies were better dressed than others, allowing others to see that they were people working within the castle.

These Zombies did not show any hostility to the Dog Zombie, much like how they had treated Suzuki Satoru when he had first arrived in this world. In other words, they were not under the control of the mysterious undead being within this castle.

Still, even if they had the same abilities as Suzuki Satoru, surely they would not employ their limited-use abilities on a mere Dog Zombie.

“...Zombies, then. No, only Zombies.”

“Yes. There are Zombies inside the castle — everyone inside the castle who turned into a Zombie.”

In other words, he could not consider them as defensive forces.

As the Dog Zombie continued forward, Suzuki Satoru began to feel baffled.

There should have been high-tier undead here, standing watch over the entrance and passages. But as he had expected, there were none.

There's an upper limit to the levels' worth of undead that one can control. That should still be the same even in this world, so it's possible that he might have placed powerful undead creatures by his side. Speaking of which... shouldn't he have at least positioned one such creature near the castle's entrance?

He continued advancing the Dog Zombie through the castle.

It carried on as though its surroundings were totally devoid of people, although there

were Zombies wandering all over the place.

Suzuki Satoru gradually began to feel uneasy.

Things should not have gone this smoothly. He began wondering if this was a trap.

According to Punitto Moe-san's PKing For Dummies, right now I should back off and assess the situation, right? However, that assumes the enemy is on the same level as me and has PK experience. Is it possible that he might not have such experience, which is why his defenses are full of holes and he seems to lack any sense of caution?

The Dog Zombie continued past the Zombies wandering inside the castle, as laid out in the infiltration plan. Its wobbly gait from just now was calculated to make the opposition think this was an ordinary Dog Zombie that had accidentally stumbled in.

That said, I don't think it's going to be of any use. Still, most unintelligent undead — the controlled kind, who only know how to obey simple orders — probably won't notice or run off to tell their master.

Yesterday, he had asked Keno, "If you had to position sentries, where would you put them?" and the Dog Zombie was following the path she believed to be safest. It ended at Keno's father's room — the biggest and most luxurious room in the castle. If there was an enemy leader, it would most likely be found there.

Fortunately, the floor and ceiling had not collapsed from decay, and the Dog Zombie soon neared its destination. If the enemy had deployed a wide-area <Delay Teleportation> effect, then all his plans would go up in smoke; therefore he had also factored in the maximum radius of such an effect.

"We're going into close contact after this. Use the crystal in an emergency."

"Understood — I'm counting on you, Satoru-sama."

He memorized the scenery that the Dog Zombie had seen, and then had it back off. Suzuki Satoru could still switch places with it by using its cash item if he felt he was in danger, so he sincerely hoped that it could successfully escape.

He then began to buff himself.

He could not forget to cast <See Through> on himself. There was a limit to the powers

of a Dog Zombie's vision. There might really have been an invisible undead being along the way, and there was no telling if it was trailing behind the Dog Zombie. Such caution was well-warranted.

And then there was the most important thing — <Perfect Unknowable>.

There was no need to change out his equipment. He had already kitted himself out to face a necromancer before coming here.

In the moment that Suzuki Satoru cast <Greater Teleportation>, he was taken to his memorized location.

He looked around to see if there were any undead creatures that the Dog Zombie had missed.

—There were none.

He could not be relieved just yet. What took its place was a tension born of fear that filled his bony body.

The idea that he was in the heart of the enemy territory made his nonexistent heart pound. However, that anxiety did not make him stiffen up, probably because he was undead.

He advanced without a sound, using flight to ensure he did not touch the ground.

Slowly, he approached the king's chamber.

He was almost there. Just then, the door suddenly opened, and he could see an undead creature beyond it.

Suzuki Satoru's face turned gray.

This was one of the worst-case scenarios.

It was an encounter.

The appearance and equipment of the undead being he saw looked very similar to what Keno had described.

Seeing the undead being that looked like an Overlord did not make Suzuki Satoru feel like his chance had come. Rather, it felt more like danger approaching. The words “fall back” came to mind, but the plan had always been to conduct a reconnaissance in force; how could he leave without seeing a single one of the opposition’s trump cards?

Negotiating with his opposition had never been an option from the start. Therefore, Suzuki Satoru cast his spell, like a killer from the darkness.

“<Triplet Maximize Magic Reality Slash>“

He opened with his most damaging spell. This was a good move that allowed him to disregard his opponent’s resistances. However, it would not allow him to gain much information. That said, he did not care much about finding his opponent’s resistances and he did not have the time to use <Time Stop> and similar spells to discern his weaknesses.

The spell, known as the most damaging of tenth-tier spells, struck the undead being, who wobbled.

Suzuki Satoru immediately considered his next move.

I can’t take out an Overlord in one hit. Then what about repeating the same spell? No, the enemy might teleport away and come back with reinforcements. Then should I block his teleportation? <Perfect Unknowable> was dispelled when I attacked, should I recast it and then make my escape? Come to think of it, why did he show himself alone in front of an intruder who could make it this far into a powerful undead being’s territory? Where are his minions? Is he taking me lightly?

As his mind raced, inspiration suddenly struck Suzuki Satoru.

It was all a trap, designed to create an opportunity where Suzuki Satoru would leave Keno’s side.

“Tch!”

Suzuki Satoru could not help exclaiming as the anxiety got to him.

That was very likely.

And then the undead being which lay flat on the ground crumbled to nothing, as

though a long time had passed for it, leaving only its gear to roll along the ground. Among them was an important item that Keno had mentioned — a crystal wand.

“Is, is it dead?”

Impossible, Suzuki Satoru thought. That single attack could not have beaten an Overlord.

Could it be an illusion?

Suzuki Satoru immediately ruled out that notion. Anything short of special illusions or specialized class skills were useless against undead beings like himself. Therefore, it was most likely not an illusion.

No, wait, could this be something unique to this world, an illusion-specialized Overlord? Something which doesn't exist in YGGDRASIL? If we go by the basic principle of losing something to gain something else, then is it possible that it lost the ability to dominate other undead as a price for its abilities? It's not impossible, right?

Of course, Suzuki Satoru had also harbored doubts that, “Keno had overestimated the opposition’s strength and they were actually very weak.” However, any losses caused by overestimating the opposition ought to be lighter than the losses incurred by underestimating them.

It would just be a joke if the former was the case, but things would not be that simple if it were the latter. Therefore, Suzuki Satoru rejected the possibility that he had overestimated his foe.

Given the present circumstances, that left only one answer.

“It’s a trap!”

What was the objective of this trap?

Why had the enemy given his double imitation gear? Had it really come out of the room by accident? If that was not the case, then he ought to assume that the opposition was already aware of his plans.

Did word get out? Then this might be a trap targeted at me or Keno — or even both of us!

If the trap was only intended to catch Suzuki Satoru, then this was a place that could seal his doom, and the danger would only grow the longer he remained. But what if Keno was their target? Or both of them?

Looking around, he saw no sign that the enemy was launching an attack.

Erk!

It was most likely that this trap was aimed at Keno. After all, Suzuki Satoru had only just appeared several days ago.

—No! Wait! Could it be that this undead summoned me to this world? But — could this be possible? Normally speaking, this would be a trap for Keno.

Or perhaps there was some secret to this castle and so he was looking for Keno, who was its key. Perhaps he had been observing everything Suzuki Satoru and Keno had been doing, just as Suzuki Satoru had been observing the opposition. The enemy was probably waiting for his chance to separate Keno from her trump card, Suzuki Satoru.

It's possible!

After considering that it was very likely it was all a trap, Suzuki Satoru heartily congratulated his enemy.

He had probably been in the palm of his opponent's hand all this time.

If he went to look for Keno now, it was very likely that he would be walking into a lethal ambush by his enemy's main forces that had been laid beforehand. Suzuki Satoru — no, Punitto Moe would have done such a thing.

If it was him doing it, he would probably use Keno as a hostage to negotiate with his enemy.

This would be killing two birds with one stone.

Right now, the best course of action for Suzuki Satoru would be to teleport somewhere safe. After that, if Keno were captured by the enemy, he would find some way to rescue her. If there truly was no way to do so, then that would be farewell for her.

From the opposition's point of view, not killing Suzuki Satoru here was because he was

wary of him. If Suzuki Satoru fled right now with his tail between his legs, he would probably not give chase. All would be fine as long as they did not gain anything from Keno.

“Tch.”

Suzuki Satoru clicked his tongue and looked outside, then decided to teleport into the air.

His field of vision suddenly shifted, like it had when he had invaded the castle. It would seem there were no teleport-blocking measures in place. The worst-case scenario, the one that Suzuki Satoru wanted to avoid, was if he could teleport into the castle but not leave the same way.

While one could not teleport into or out of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick, there were many dungeons in the game that prohibited escape by teleportation.

Looking down from the air, the outer walls of the noble estate where Keno was hiding were plainly visible to him. Using his improved eyesight after becoming Momonga, he could tell with certainty that there had been no changes from before his intrusion. However closely he looked, he could not see any enemies around Keno.

Is he... using Keno as bait? I see. His plan is probably to wait till I take the bait and seize us both together. Well-played.

Suzuki Satoru smiled.

It was the smile of one who had completely seen through his opponent's plans.

Suzuki Satoru cast <Perfect Unknowable> and looked down from the sky.

There'll be a good chance to save Keno when the enemy notices me in the air and moves into action on the ground.

Suzuki Satoru observed Keno from the air, in the hopes of divining his adversary's intentions.

And so, three minutes passed.

He heard nothing, besides the wind blowing through the air. Nothing flew over at him,

and certainly nothing attacked Keno.

What, what's this? Why isn't the enemy doing anything!? Could it be — he's waiting for me to make a move, and then respond to it?

“Dammit! You’re pretty good!” Suzuki Satoru muttered to himself.

The opposition’s pretty smart. They know we don’t want to die too. In that case — I’ll do this.

Suzuki Satoru decided to make a move and change the situation.

He would contact Keno with <Message> and then change the location of the battlefield.

“Keno, it’s me, Satoru. I’m watching you from the air. Your present location is now very dangerous. Head to the hiding place in the sewers right away.”

“『You’re lying!』”

And with that, the <Message> was cut off.

“What!?”

What was the meaning of that? The undead Suzuki Satoru panicked at Keno’s wholly incomprehensible reaction.

The <Message> was a lie?... Don’t tell me Keno’s already been hit by an enemy spell? But she’s undead, right? She shouldn’t be subject to mind-affecting effects. No, that’s just my YGGDRASIL knowledge. Are the undead in this world vulnerable to mental effects too? I don’t get it! Was Keno in league with the enemy all along? But she was the one who found the hiding place, don’t tell me that was the enemy’s doing too... what should I do?

The PK handbook did not mention situations like this, and Suzuki Satoru had no prior information to fall back on.

Should I just forget about everything and run? Suzuki Satoru thought. He had observed Keno’s surroundings from the air for a full seven minutes and nothing had changed.

Having grown tired of listening to the wind, Suzuki Satoru spoke quietly.

“...There’s no signs of movement at all.”

The pointless wait had banished the excitement of being involved in a life-or-death battle.

No, this is also an enemy trap. Time means nothing to we who are undead... that said, waiting is hard to bear, but it's no big deal. The enemy must be waiting for me to get anxious and rush out!

A voice in his heart said, “That’s probably the case,” and Suzuki Satoru abandoned his plans to flee. Instead, he continued waiting.

—Ten minutes had passed.

...This is strange. Something is definitely not right. Anyway, I'll start by getting the Dog Zombie... ah. That would mean the Dog Zombie with the cash item would disappear... I wouldn't be able to find the item either. Urgh...

He could not have it deliver something to Keno either.

He could not summon or create undead.

He considered that the opposition might have avoided them and entered the sewer, then stationed fairly powerful undead there. If he wiped out those undead now, then he would need to worry about being ambushed by the enemy in the sewers while they were retreating.

As he thought that, he shifted his attention to the Dog Zombie he had summoned with his excess mana. It had already returned to the vicinity of the castle gate to stand by.

Then should I send it over to Keno and show her the way?

Perhaps the enemy had not attacked because he had discovered Suzuki Satoru in the air. Therefore, if Suzuki Satoru was gone, the enemy might decide to take action.

After considering that point, Suzuki Satoru cast <Greater Teleportation> again and teleported to the courtyard of a house not far from Keno’s position. After he made sure that he was not visible from the castle, he ordered the Dog Zombie to move towards Keno.

It would seem Keno was using <Invisibility>, because the Dog Zombie could not see her. However, when the Dog Zombie reached the area he had seen from the air, Keno suddenly appeared.

The Dog Zombie tugged at the hem of Keno's dress.

Keno seemed to understand its meaning and jogged behind the Dog Zombie as it led the way.

After finally emerging from hiding, Suzuki Satoru could see Keno as the Dog Zombie brought her over. However, he could not relax yet. Undead beings with high-level thief skills were not common, but they still existed. Someone like that might launch a sneak attack.

“Satoru-sama! You’re safe!”

It had been far beyond the appointed time, and she was probably very worried. Keno looked overjoyed, but now was not the time to be happy.

“Come here!”

Suzuki Satoru leapt out and took Keno's hand. There was no time to explain everything to Keno, whose eyes were wide. Suzuki Satoru immediately cast <Greater Teleportation>, taking Keno and the Dog Zombie to their sewer base.

He checked his surroundings after arriving, paying particular attention to the entrance. There was no sign the door had been opened. The Eyeball Corpse floating in the air had not been damaged either. He could be sure that it was safe.

“Whew.”

It was only when he returned here that Suzuki Satoru allowed himself to breathe a sigh of relief. After that, he remembered that he had to explain things to Keno.

After dismissing the Dog Zombie and picking up the cash item, Suzuki Satoru began his explanation. The main points were that he had wiped out the undead being Keno had been talking about, but the enemy was far too weak, so it was possible that it might have been a body double or something similar. Thus, he had chosen to withdraw.

“No, I don’t think that’s the case. Don’t you think you defeated it so easily because

you're such a powerful magic caster, Satoru-sama?"

"If it had been an Overlord like me, then surely it would not have gone down so easily."

"The difference between my strength and the enemy's is too great, so all I could tell was that it was very powerful. Could that be possible?"

"I considered that too... in that case, I'll go check by myself again."

It was very dangerous, but it was also the only way.

Suzuki Satoru could sense the presence of the undead, but he could not sense their strength. Therefore, he had no choice but to evaluate them with his own eyes.

"Thank you very much."

"The search might take one or two hours, so you'll need to wait here."

After ordering the Eyeball Corpse to protect Keno, Suzuki Satoru teleported to the noble estate again. He observed the interior of the castle from there, but there was no commotion or any sign that the alert level had been increased.

He conjured a powerful undead being with <Summon Undead 10th> and sent it into the castle. However, no battle ensued. Thus, Suzuki Satoru steeled his resolve and followed closely behind it.

He retraced the Dog Zombie's path to the throne room.

On his way there, he did not encounter any other undead besides Zombies.

The door to the throne room remained open. The robe and gear of the undead being he had wiped out earlier were scattered on the ground.

No way... don't tell me he was really too weak? —Ah, this is bad, I made a mistake. Perhaps that really was a body double and the real thing fled immediately once he realized he couldn't beat me. That's certainly possible. If I'd known this back then, would things have been better if I had opened with <Dimensional Lock> or some other battlefield control spell instead of attack magic?

I made a bad move, he lamented as he directed the undead being beside him into the

room. There were no undead reactions from inside, but he could not eliminate the possibility that there were guards inside who were not undead.

After seeing that his minion had not been attacked, Suzuki Satoru stepped in front of the room and peeked inside.

Of the many tables inside, a lot of them had been moved over from other rooms. They were stacked with books, until they formed a heaping pile. Parchments and rough papers were strewn all over the ground, and they were filled with characters that Suzuki Satoru did not recognize.

It looked like the room of a scholar, or a bureaucrat who dealt heavily in paperwork.

“The information’s all here... but there’s nobody around?”

Suzuki Satoru took all the items on the ground into his inventory. While he wanted to investigate them right away, he ought to keep being on the lookout for powerful undead as his top priority.

Suzuki Satoru pretty much turned the interior of the castle upside down.

Two hours later, he folded his arms and began to think.

I can’t find him anywhere! He’s fled... no, I doubt it. Escaping by himself would be one thing, but it would be impossible to flee with all his minions under my watch. More importantly, he left all these document-like things here. In addition, there were no signs that any other rooms were used... basically I can conclude that the opposition was too weak.

Suzuki Satoru fumed over all the time and brain cells he had wasted. One could say that this was a failure brought about by fighting without making appropriate backup plans ahead of time.

If Punitto-san heard about this, he’d nag me all day long about “Things went so well simply because you were lucky,” etc.

In truth, he might have been worse off if the enemy had not been so weak. This place was different from the game. Perhaps he only had one life — after all, he did not know how the resurrection mechanics worked — and therefore, he needed to take better care of himself.

After reaffirming his thoughts, Suzuki Satoru set off to where Keno was.

"Hahhh, the Zombies are still Zombies... as I thought returning them to normal isn't that easy. Still, that's why this was such a priority... but when you get down to it, can you really restore them?"

Suzuki Satoru took the wand he had picked up just now from his inventory. He looked it over, then put it away and cast his teleportation spell.

2

Suzuki Satoru returned to the castle with Keno in tow. This time, he was planning to search the interior more carefully. He lent Keno an item that could cast *<Fly>* and the two of them used *<Fly>* to look around the inside of the castle. All Keno did was to see if there was anything different about the castle compared to when she had lived in it. Even so, checking such a huge castle took quite a lot of time.

In the end, they had not turned up anything special. Keno had locked her parents in her mother's room. While they were still undead, they were also still intact. It would seem that undead being had not been interested in anything other than turning the throne room into a research lab.

And so they returned to the sewer for the time being. After Keno's mana recovered, they cast *<Fly>* again and headed to the throne room for more in-depth investigations.

The sun set, and night slowly descended upon the land.

The throne room was divided into three rooms. The one adjoining the door was piled high with books, the second was heaped with treasures gathered from throughout the city, and the final room was the undead being's lab. It contained some mysterious fluids and a stench that would not go away.

After seeking Keno's opinion on the matter, Suzuki Satoru decided to put all the items into his inventory since it did not exceed his weight capacity, and then he moved them into a random room.

Keno had originally wanted to go back to her own chambers, but Suzuki Satoru shot that idea down. If they were going to do that, they would not have needed to use *<Fly>* while conducting their investigations.

After that, they decided to move on to the room once used by the maids. When Suzuki Satoru had first explored it, both he and his minion had prepared to move into the room, but instead they had gotten a faceful of white dust. It was less dusty now, though.

“There’s so much dust...”

Suzuki Satoru had been mentally prepared for this, and all he could do was shrug at Keno’s lamentation.

“Well, it’s been a long time since someone lived here.”

The floor was thick with dust, which indicated that nobody had set foot in here for a long time. Therefore, the two of them did not dwell on it after giving it a once-over.

Keno was the first one into the room. She went through it and opened the window.

The wind that rushed in threw up a great deal of dust. If there were any living creatures present who needed to breathe, they would probably have been coughing by now. However, both of them were undead, who had no such need, and the most that the clouds of dust could do was mildly annoy them.

“May I clean up this room?”

You don’t need to ask my permission for that, Suzuki Satoru thought, and then he answered.

“I don’t mind. However, what do you think of cleaning up the dust this way?”

Suzuki Satoru took out a scroll. As a compulsive hoarder, he was the sort of person who did not use consumable items lightly. However, this was just a low-level item and he had many superior substitutes for it, so it did not matter to him.

The scroll contained a <Summon Monster 1st> spell.

It could summon a low-level Lesser Air Elemental. There was no need to speak to it; it was as though it had a mental link to the caster, who could give orders with a mental impulse.

The Air Elemental began spinning, and it swiftly blew the dust within the room outside.

"Keno-san, this scroll contains the same kind of spell. Why don't you try summoning a Water Elemental with it?"

Suzuki Satoru handed the scroll to her and Keno cast the spell, summoning a Lesser Water Elemental, as he had said.

"Thank you, Satoru-sama."

"There's no need to stand on ceremony. Don't take it to heart. Elementals summoned by first tier scrolls only exist for a short time. Please keep your priorities in mind when cleaning the room."

"Alright!"

"Also, you can dispel the <Fly> spell now."

"Got it!"

Although there had been no great changes in the situation, perhaps being able to regain her home made Keno visibly happier, and she nodded. As he observed the marked change in Keno, Suzuki Satoru contemplated it with a calmness that surprised even himself.

He had given Keno the scroll for a reason.

While he had conducted many tests after coming to this world, this was the first time he had actually used a consumable item like a scroll.

I see... so YGGDRASIL scrolls can be used by the inhabitants of this world. Then what about the other way around? I'd like to test that out too. Also, the Elementals summoned by the scroll are very short-lived — she didn't seem to find anything wrong with that. So my knowledge of scrolls in YGGDRASIL is also applicable to this world... am I right?

While he had asked Keno about things like that before, he had his proof now. It was not that he did not trust her, but seeing was believing, after all.

As he had said, the two Elementals soon vanished, but by that time the room was already quite clean.

"Where shall we look next?"

“I wanted to start from this bundle of parchments.”

Why had that undead creature come here?

Who was that undead being?

What lay behind all this?

And most importantly — was there really a way to restore the people who had been turned into Zombies?

It was those questions in her heart which drove her, giving her the faint hope that she could find the answer within those parchments, which was why she wanted to start with them.

Just as Keno was about to open up those rolled-up parchments that reeked of a foreboding odor, Suzuki Satoru stopped her.

“Is something the matter, Satoru-sama?”

“Allow me to remind you, but have you checked if they contain traps? Is it possible that they contain some sort of magical trap?”

“—Eh?”

“Some traps are disguised as scrolls. When people try to use them, they explode, and so on.”

“Do, do such things exist?”

“Huh, you mean they don’t?”

The two of them looked at each other.

“Ah, er, Satoru-sama, do you have a solution?”

“I’m not good at disarming traps. I think it would be best to let one of my created undead open it.”

Saying so, Suzuki Satoru created a Death Knight.

He had the Death Knight go outside the room and open it from a distance. However, the problem was that ordinary parchment would also burn in the event of an explosion, so he had to take each piece out individually to check if they were safe.

After repeating the process with all the parchments, they moved on to the books.

While the Death Knight repeated a rote action, Keno was also checking the parchments that had been declared safe.

However, Keno's face froze.

"I'm sorry, Satoru-sama. I don't understand these words..."

"Ah..."

He had heard before that many languages existed in this world. Suzuki Satoru stood behind Keno and looked at the parchments. *Wow, I can't believe it's in Japanese* — but such wishful thinking was not to be.

"In that case—" Suzuki Satoru took a monocle out of his inventory. "I'll lend this to you. This item should allow you to translate languages."

Suzuki Satoru did not use it himself because he felt that he would not be able to understand the contents of the research.

As a proper adult, he ought to check if it contained any content that was not suitable for children, but this was still better than looking at it and saying, "It's too specialized, I don't understand it," and then handing it to Keno.

Keno did not seem to realize that Suzuki Satoru was abasing himself in his heart and thanked him. Then, she put on the monocle and began reading.

It would seem the monocle was effective, because Keno began perusing the contents of the parchments...

She read in silence, reaching for the next parchment after finishing the first. In order not to disturb Keno, Suzuki Satoru moved aside.

There was nothing he, as a person who had never considered magic to be a field of study, could learn from them. From time to time, Keno would mention a question

about magical principles — to Suzuki Satoru it was just confusing. He did not feign knowledge either; instead replying with a simple “I don’t know.”

Even though Suzuki Satoru did not seem to know anything, Keno did not seem to distrust him.

After all, the fact of his overwhelming power was on full display, and there were some classes which controlled magic by feeling rather than theoretical knowledge. She must have taken him for one of those feel-based magic casters.

As he looked at Keno’s small frame, buried in her books, Suzuki Satoru began to lay out the items he had discovered on the ground.

At the same time, he used his spells to see what kind of magic was imbued into those items. The first one he investigated was a staff.

After seeing the magic it contained, he called out to Keno, despite feeling a little embarrassed.

“Excuse me, but could you come over and take a look at this item?”

“Ah! Yes!”

Keno hurriedly turned to look his way.

“About these it—”

“—Ah!”

Keno stood up from her seat and ran over to the items, where she picked it up.

“This is it! As long as we have this!”

The look of delight on Keno seemed like it would revert to normal from time to time, but it was unconsciously replaced by joy again.

“Is this the resurrection item you mentioned earlier?”

The notion in his heart had been validated; this was an item the undead being had abandoned when he invaded.

This was one of the nation's treasures, along with the Mask of Ilvia Hordan, the Robe of the First Invern, and the Gauntlet of the Griffin Lord.

It was a transparent wand, carved out of a gigantic crystal and further worked upon.

Its name was Lost White.

If what she said yesterday was right, then Suzuki Satoru believed that the spell contained within it ought to be the fifth-tier divine spell <Raise Dead>. But according to his investigations just now, the spell's effects were slightly different. Or rather, it looked like a wand, it should be usable as a wand, but fundamentally, it was something else entirely.

It felt like a bit of a shame to just use it like that.

However, while Suzuki Satoru also had resurrective items which contained higher-tier spells, he had no intention of taking them out until yesterday.

One of the reasons was because he was not sure if resurrection magic followed the same mechanics in this world. But it was true that he had covered that part up.

Suzuki Satoru was not nearly thick-skinned enough to be frank about that. However, Momonga now had no skin to speak of.

“Yes! Now I’m sure everyone can be...”

Keno bit her lip for a moment, probably because there was no way to save everyone with a limited-use item. No, it was obvious that a powerful item would have some kind of limits on its usage. Keno was now in a position where she would have to decide who to save.

“Even so, we’ll need to destroy them first before we’ll get a chance to restore them to human beings.”

“Then how can I bring them back to life?”

“Erm... how about ending their life as a Zombie and then trying to resurrect them with this item?”

“I see... we won’t be able to test it out in the castle, then,” Suzuki Satoru explained to a

mystified Keno.

"While my knowledge of this nation might differ from this one, if we destroy a Zombie here — pardon me, if we kill someone here, it's possible that we might incur the hostility of all the surrounding Zombies. In order to avoid that, we need to take our test Zombie far away where it won't generate hostility. However, I have no idea how far that would be. Do you have any ideas?"

"Huh? Ah, yes, is it like that?"

"...It isn't?"

The two of them looked at each other.

This was not so much a divide in their understanding of the world so much as neither of them not being sure what the problem was. Therefore, they needed to discuss the gains and losses of such an action together.

In the end, they decided to let Keno finish reading all the books first. This was a decision made in the hope that one of them would give her an answer, entrusting their luck to the heavens.

After seeing Keno pick her books up again, Suzuki Satoru went back to examining the remaining items from that undead creature.

As Suzuki Satoru picked up a silver necklace, he knitted his nonexistent eyebrows.

This isn't a magic item... it's an enchanted necklace. Is this kind of accessory in style?

One could not equip multiple magic items to the same item slot. While one could wear many magical items around their neck, he had heard from Keno that only the powers from the item that had been last put on would be usable, so it would seem that principle was the same in this world as it was in YGGDRASIL.

While he did not particularly mind if that undead being was the sort of fellow who adorned himself with pointless ornamentation, it did not seem to be the case. He did not have any other non-magical items besides this necklace.

There must be some meaning to this.

There was a circular silver object depending from the necklace. It looked slightly worn, but he could clearly see what looked like symbols and letters carved into it.

Is there some significance to this? Is it a key for something? No, it might be a holy symbol of some kind, for an undead creature. Or was this some core item with religious significance?

There seems to be something on the back, it looks like some kind of... guild badge... ah! Does this imply that it belongs to some organization?

He was unsure of the meaning of this, so all he could do was conjecture. However, it would be bad if it belonged to some group.

While I'm wary because it's possible... I just have to pay that Keno knows the meaning of that emblem.

Keno was speed-reading, flipping rapidly through the books.

From the side, he could see a tense and frightened look on her face. He probably would not be hearing good news from her.

“Keno-san, I’m sorry to interrupt while you’re busy, but could you help me take a look at this necklace?”

“Huh? Ah, yes... let’s see, it doesn’t look like letters. Are they... marks?”

“I see. Then what about things on your end?”

There was a pile of books that had been read and a pile of books which had not been read. He had asked because the former dwarfed the latter. Keno sighed heavily. It was a sigh which sounded like it came from a company employee who would be working overnight. It did not sound like a sigh that ought to have come from a youthful-looking girl.

“Firstly, those books concerned various kinds of magical knowledge. The parchments, on the other hand, contained matters that the undead being was looking into — messily-written research notes. But they were too complex, so it’s possible I might have misinterpreted them to some extent.”

Keno rounded her shoulders in dejection. Her voice sounded gloomy too.

"It's just... that powerful undead being that I thought was the mastermind doesn't seem to have anything to do with the people of the city becoming undead."

I thought so too, Suzuki Satoru mused.

That undead creature had been far too weak for someone who could turn an entire city into Zombies.

"While I found something that looked like a diary, it only said that the undead creature you killed was also puzzled by how everyone in the city could have turned into a Zombie, and that he'd liked to have investigated it if he had the time. Also..."

Keno looked like she was about to say something, and then she changed her mind.

"...That's all. It didn't have anything to do with that undead being."

"Is that so? Then what are you going to do?"

"...Even so, I still want to see if they can be resurrected."

There was a hollow determination in Keno's voice. She probably understood that it would be useless. After all, she was the one who said that there might be a possibility if they eliminated the main culprit, and now she was the one saying that the undead being that Suzuki Satoru had wiped out had nothing to do with it. That said, even if she understood, she still had to give it a try.

Suzuki Satoru looked at the girl and thought about a fire.

It was about how even if one was alone, there was no need to put out a fire that had been prepared for others.

"Is that so... in that case, we won't use your parents. We'll experiment with one of the guards."

Keno's face twisted as she heard the words "experiment". However, she did not say anything, because she knew that pretty words would not be able to change the reality of the situation.

Suzuki Satoru began by opening the window and jumping out, using <Fly> to hover in mid-air. From there, he memorized a location far in the distance, beyond the city limits,

and teleported there. Once he reached his destination, he surveyed his surroundings with his ability, and after verifying that there were no undead around, he memorized the area and cast <Greater Teleportation> to return to Keno's side.

After that, the two of them left the room. Keno led him to a guard who had apparently been quite strong in life before becoming a Zombie, and then he cast <Gate>.

He grabbed part of the guard's armor in order to make certain that it could not be interpreted as an attack, then dragged him into the <Gate>.

And so, the three of them were transported outside the city.

Just as Keno said, "I'll do it," Suzuki Satoru killed the Zombie in one blow, without saying a word.

He did not smash his head to bits with a crushing weapon. Instead, he lopped his head off with a magically-conjured sword.

"Now then, can you use that item?"

"A-Alright..."

The pure white light within the wand moved to the corpse of the Zombie guard.

The corpse slowly got to its feet, but that was not a sign that it had returned to life. It was simply a Zombie moving once more.

Keno lowered her head, and Suzuki Satoru, who had been worried about being attacked, let his caution fade. The Zombie just walked around aimlessly, with no signs of hostility. Presumably, any aggro that had been generated had faded with its death.

"...What should we do?" Suzuki Satoru asked. After a brief period of introspection, Keno raised her head and looked Suzuki Satoru in the eye.

"—Satoru-sama. Do you think that I can restore everyone if I work hard enough on my research?"

Her voice was ponderous and heavy.

It was the voice of someone who did not even believe herself. It was the voice of

someone whose only hope had been crushed to bits.

Suzuki Satoru thought for a while. He could try to comfort her or simply to gloss it over. He could also try to steer the topic back to an appropriate direction. However, he compared it to his own image from several days ago, and then he discarded all those selfish notions.

He quickly inhaled, and then Suzuki Satoru met Keno's gaze before speaking.

"I won't say the possibility is zero. While I haven't studied magic academically, I feel that there might be someone out there in this world who might know what happened here. If we ask them for help, perhaps we might be able to devise an effective solution. However... it'll be very difficult."

"...I, I think so too."

The undead could not cry. They lacked the capacity to shed tears.

However, Suzuki Satoru knew that Keno was crying.

"Actually, I'd sensed it from a long time ago. There wouldn't be a happy end to all of this, with the sun rising and everyone waking up by themselves. In the end, I couldn't save anyone, and I couldn't bring about an ending like that..."

"You can't be certain that you can't save them."

"I can't be certain that I can save them either, right?"

Suzuki Satoru expressed his agreement with silence. However, that was based on the YGGDRASIL knowledge that Suzuki Satoru had.

"...Like I said earlier, we can't say for sure that the possibility is zero."

Suzuki Satoru looked to the sky, and the faces of his former friends floated in the night sky. After making up his mind, Suzuki Satoru expelled a breath.

"...I have a friend called Yamaiko. She often said that children were a treasure. Right now, I will carry out her will."

Suzuki Satoru produced the Ring of Shooting Stars that Yamaiko had given him. Truth

to be told, he did not want to waste it in such a way. But Yamaiko would scold him if he did not use it now.

After all, with this in hand, I can use the remaining two wishes for whatever I want.

A strange sensation assailed Suzuki Satoru as he activated the ring.

He understood how to use the spell <Wish Upon A Star>.

He could pay several levels' worth of experience to make a bigger wish. However, he only planned to use a single level's worth of experience. In other words, when he made a wish, a smaller wish was more likely to come true than a bigger one. But if it failed, the experience would be burned and that would be the end of it.

He had the feeling that "restoring Keno's parents to normal" was more likely to come true than "restoring everyone in the city to normal." However —

"I WISH! That I would learn a way to restore the people of this city to normal!"

That was all.

Once he understood the means, he could carry it out.

However, after one of the three shooting stars carved into the ring vanished, all that remained with Suzuki Satoru was frustration. And then, he hesitated over how he should explain all this to Keno, who was staring at him with a blank look on her face.

He mock-coughed a few times, and the Suzuki Satoru addressed Keno with the look of a salaryman on his face.

"I just used an item which could grant wishes. After using it, I came to realize something — Keno-san, I'll get to the point. There is no way to restore the Zombies of this city — its people — to their original state."

That was the answer. He had lost a chance to grant a wish forever for that answer.

In YGGDRASIL, you were forced to pick an option from a random list of selections, so which way was better? Suzuki Satoru hurried continued speaking.

"However! This is simply the information I have obtained with my magic. There might

be another way. Therefore — let's explore the world together. We'll find someone who's far better than us, ask them for help, and see what possibilities open up."

"Is... there really such a person?"

"I believe there is."

Although a part of his mind was wondering why he was going this far to cheer her up, he had not forgotten the kinship to her which he had felt back then.

Keno stared at Suzuki Satoru, and then she nodded.

"Alright — I believe there is. Still, will it be alright?"

Suzuki Satoru asked Keno what was alright, and she answered.

"Going out and exploring the world together. Is it really alright for me to accompany you?" Keno looked down at her little palms. "I mean, I'll get in the way—"

"—You won't."

"Huh?"

"I need your strength for this. Also — in for a penny, in for a pound, as they say. I'll help you out a little more." At the very least, until she could travel by herself. "Otherwise—I feel like Yamaiko-san and Touch-san would scold me. Keno Fasris Invern. Let's — yes, let's travel together."

Keno took the hand that Suzuki Satoru had extended to her.

"Th-Thank you... very much... Satoru-sama..."

Keno bowed her head and trembled. While she could not shed tears, that was all. Keno was quietly sobbing without crying.

Still, it would not do for her to thank him that much. After all, he had ulterior motives.

Well, forget it, Suzuki Satoru thought. After all, she lost everything at that moment. Helping her for a while more won't hurt.

In any case, he had no goals of his own now. The things he was supposed to protect were gone, and the bonds he was supposed to maintain were broken. All that remained were this ring and this staff, as mementos, but that was all.

"Then let's hurry and finish our preparations so we can leave. I have the feeling there isn't much time left."

Keno voiced her doubts, and Suzuki Satoru explained himself.

If their adversary belonged to an organization, they might have kept in contact. In that case, the enemy would get worried about losing touch with him, and so he suspected that it was very likely that they would send reinforcements over. While he could probably slaughter them all if that undead being's power was any indication of their strength, he could not conclude that there was nobody stronger than him around. Therefore, the best course of action would be to take what they could carry and leave this place as soon as possible.

For that reason, he had set up little tricks in various places to keep the information from getting out.

After he saw that Keno understood, the two of them returned to the castle again.

3

"So we're going travelling... Keno-san, do you have experience travelling, pardon me, I mean, going abroad?"

"I apologize, Satoru-sama. When I was young — younger than I am now — I think I went to various places within the country, but I can hardly remember it now."

"I see... in that case, you won't know what to bring."

"We're undead. We don't need to eat or sleep. Surely it would be fine to not have anything, right?"

"Well, that is the case. But according to what you said, Keno-san, the undead are the enemies of all living beings, and they are to be destroyed on sight, am I wrong? Living openly in a world full of enemies... well, I'm not sure if it counts as living, but even if we're just existing, I feel we need to disguise ourselves to some extent?"

“Disguise? You mean wearing masks like the Prince of Phenia, is that it?”

Keno’s eyes lit up. It was the first time he had seen her do that ever since meeting her.

Had she allowed herself to relax? Had she been liberated, more or less? Or was this her look of anticipation about the outside world? It was not a bad thing, so he did not comment on it, but who was this Prince of Phenia? Still, he had the feeling that she would talk his ear off if he asked about it. He could settle any questions he had during the journey; for now, he could just take things as they came. It was only later that he learned about such a short story from her.

“Ahhh, no. People will suspect we’re up to no good if we wear masks... maybe it’s not so bad... no, they’ll suspect us.”

“Is that so?”

The look of childish delight on Keno’s face fell away, which Suzuki Satoru found both strange and new, but he hid his feelings and continued speaking.

“While disguising yourself implies changing your physical appearance, it also involves not doing things that will make others suspicious of you. Don’t you think people will get suspicious if you don’t eat a single meal with them?”

There were items that could do that, of course, but if they had to explain this to each and every person they met, they might end up blowing their covers by accident. Instead, it would be better not to arouse suspicion in the first place.

“We’ll pretend to eat and sleep like other travellers, but the most important thing is taking a steam bath to cleanse ourselves of the grime of the road.”

“A steam bath? You mean a mist sauna?”

“Ahhh, they have those here too? That’s right, a sauna, or a bath.”

The undead had no metabolism, so they would not produce waste, but dirt and dust and the like could still get their skin dirty. While it did not particularly inconvenience him, it felt better to be clean than dirty.

“But will we be able to enter a city, Satoru-sama?”

Suzuki Satoru touched his face.

"I'll need to think about that part. However, I'm looking for knowledgeable people. I'm sure we'll be able to find some way to enter a city without trespassing into it via magic, in order to make friendly contact with them."

Keno nodded several times in approval.

"Therefore... well, I guess we need something for travel expenses and tolls. Of course, I have some money of my own, as well as gems and items which can be sold."

Suzuki Satoru casually took a gem out of his inventory. Keno gulped as she saw a ruby that was the size of her palm. A brief shadow crossed Keno's pretty face, but the change had been so subtle that Suzuki Satoru thought that he might have been imagining things. Besides, why would such a big gemstone make her gloomy?

"Still, I don't know if this will be enough."

"We don't know how long this journey will take, and we'll probably need to give gifts when we meet these knowledgeable people, and we might also need to buy expensive items. Is that it?"

"Yes. So, if possible, can we take all the wealth in this country or this city? Of course, you'll be managing it, Keno-san. We can pay our own way during the journey."

"All of it?"

"Indeed. I apologize for saying this, but these people who are now undead don't need money, do they? Who knows, some country might send in their troops to seize all their wealth too. Therefore, we should make effective use of it—" Suzuki Satoru did not miss the pained expression on Keno's face. "—Does it displease you?"

"Ehhh? Ah! I'm very sorry. That's not what I meant. If that is what you think, then I will go along with it, Satoru-sama."

Keno immediately adjusted expression and put on a winning smile.

"Keno-san."

Keno's body trembled.

“Ah, ah, please forgive me, Satoru-sama...”

“Ahhhh, it’s fine, I’m not angry, Keno-san. We are travelling companions, and since we are companions, I think we should be honest with each other. That’s all. You can tell me if you have an opinion on the matter, you know?”

However, Keno lowered her head after he said that.

This was quite vexing for Suzuki Satoru. Keno was the one who had a better sense of how the world worked, so if she did not speak up right away, it might lead to a lethal failure.

“What’s the matter, Keno-san?”

Keno hesitated for a moment, and then her face tightened up before a pained look came across her face.

And then, she spoke quietly. It was as though time had reversed itself and she was speaking in the same way she had when they had first met. However, Suzuki Satoru’s keen hearing still managed to pick it up.

“I, I’m not your equal, Satoru-sama... I don’t have any right to say anything given that I’m relying on your mercy, Satoru-sama...”

Indeed, that was the case.

Learning about the world was Suzuki Satoru’s payment for destroying the undead being in the city. That could no longer serve as terms of trade. Also, after travelling for more than a year, he would have picked up enough knowledge. After that, he would have no reason to help Keno any more, and neither would he benefit from doing so.

In other words, Keno had nothing she could offer Suzuki Satoru to buy his help. After seeing the huge gem Satoru had taken out just now, she realized that mere money would not be enough to entice Suzuki Satoru.

“Even so... I don’t want to be alone any more. Compared to that... I’d rather not say anything at all...”

This time, it was Suzuki Satoru’s turn to hold his breath.

There were times when he felt that this girl was very similar to him. But after seeing the forlorn expression she had shown just now, he realized that she felt exactly the same way as him.

Had he not felt like she had when he entered YGGDRASIL by himself, staying in a Nazarick without anyone in it?

Suzuki Satoru got to one knee, so his eyes were even with Keno's.

"Let's make a promise. Keno-san. I will not abandon you for personal — no, for my own reasons."

Yes.

I wanted someone to say that to me.

I wanted someone to stay with me until the very end.

He could see the various emotions in Keno's eyes.

"Can, can I really believe that?"

"Ahh, like I said before, we're travelling companions. So... let's travel. Yes, on a journey to uncover the unknown. We won't need any "just a little more". Let's go find a way to save your parents."

Silence fell upon them, and Keno bowed her head deeply. Then, she repeated "Thank you, thank you," over and over again.

"Now then, can you raise your head?"

Suzuki Satoru took out a gold coin and showed it to Keno, who had only looked up after her had asked her to do so three times.

"There'll be times during our journey when neither of us are willing to give way to the other. And of course, there'll be times when we're unable to determine who's right, even after we exchange opinions. At those times..."

Suzuki Satoru flipped up the coin with his finger and let it land on his palm. He was quite impressed with how he could land it so neatly on a skeletal hand. He had to keep

the fact that he felt more natural this way a secret.

“—We’ll flip a coin. We’ll use the results of the coin toss to determine who we go with. What do you think?”

“How could I! If possible—”

“—It’s fine. We’re travelling together, after all... yes, we’re friends.”

As he said the word “friends”, the faces of his past guildmates suddenly appeared in front of him.

Friends, Keno turned the word over and over in her mouth.

“How about it?”

“I understand, Satoru-sama.”

“Satoru will do. In turn, I will call you Keno.”

“But as my senior...” Keno began stammering. “A-Ah, how old are you, Satoru... sama... san?”

“My age, huh...” In terms of time spent alive, Keno was undoubtedly his superior. “Ah, I think I’ll just call you Keno-san.”

She ought to understand with that. A complicated look crossed Keno’s face, and she muttered “I don’t like it,” before puffing up her cheeks and smacking them.

“It’s Satoru and Keno, then.”

“Ehhh, you mean Satoru-san’s no good?”

“Well, that works too! Still, as friends, we ought to speak more familiarly with each other. Now then, Keno. I’ll ask you again. Are you unhappy with my previous proposition?”

Keno thought about it for a bit, and then nodded.

“By all the wealth, do you mean all the money in everyone’s homes too?”

“That was what I meant, yes.”

“Could you not do that, please? Er, Satoru... san? After all, it belongs to everyone.”

Had she said that because she was considering the possibility that everyone might be restored? Or was she speaking in her capacity as a princess who stood above the common folk? Satoru did not know which was which, but truth be told, spending time to collect pocket change was definitely not worth the effort.

It would be best to leave this place as soon as possible.

“Is that so? I see. I’ll go with that, then. But how about the money in the castle? Do you think it’s alright to take it?”

“Um... I guess...?”

She sounded like she was asking herself the question more than Suzuki Satoru. Therefore, Suzuki Satoru said nothing, but waited for Keno to reach her own conclusion. And then, a minute later—

“I think it should be fine, yes.”

Perhaps her stiff manner of speech just now had been because she could not gauge the distance between them. In truth, Suzuki Satoru also found people who immediately closed the distance and acted all chummy with him to be very annoying too.

And from Satoru’s point of view, even if the clients buying his company’s products said, “We’re friends, right?” it would not particularly endear them to him. Only time could solve that problem.

“We’ll do that, then. Let’s take all the money and items in the treasury... oh yes, what about the furniture?”

“Eh?”

“I’ve shown you a few times, but I can store items into a pocket dimension. Of course, there’s a weight limit to that, but I can easily fit cabinets and beds inside it. I don’t mind if you want to take them with you. Of course, we won’t be able to use them on our journey...”

He thought about his homebase in the past.

It was a wonderful base, one which he had built with his friends, and which he had filled with all sorts of items from the stores.

He had told Keno that it was fine because he did not want her to feel the same emptiness that he had felt at its loss.

"No, there's no need for it. Er, it's fine. But I want to take a few small things with me, that should be okay, right?"

"It's fine. Let's go to the treasury, then."

After indicating that she understood, Keno led the way to the treasury.

As they walked, Suzuki Satoru began to think.

In YGGDRASIL, gold coins were always in a single stack and they had no weight. It had been like that since it was a game, but he still enjoyed that benefit now. But would the currency in this world be treated in the same way? Or would the weight of each and every piece be totalled up? That would be troublesome.

While he could take the gems and trade them for money and items, things might be different from how they were in the game, and he might need to put effort into negotiations.

The vault he was led to was tiny by YGGDRASiL standards.

The coins were not piled into a big heap like in Nazarick, but separately packed into sacks. There were also paintings whose value eluded Suzuki Satoru and a great deal of silverware, ornaments, and the like. There were also many weapons which looked like they had been used before. They struck him as belonging to a museum as opposed to an art gallery.

The image Suzuki Satoru had conjured up in his head of the Treasury from YGGDRASiL vanished.

"Now then, Keno. All these are yours, as a princess."

"Eh? Don't you need it, Satoru-sama, no, Satoru-san? They're all the treasures of the

royal family, so I don't mind offering them, er, I mean, giving them... no..."

Suzuki Satoru smiled at Keno, who did not seem to know what to say. "You don't need to force yourself to be polite, you know."

"In any case, this is the wealth your family built up over time. Given the circumstances, it should be kept by you, as the only one who retained her senses, don't you think? Put it all in this rucksack. It's a magic item that can ignore up to 500 kilograms of weight. I'll give you one."

"Ehh? But isn't this really high-end stuff? I can't take it, Satoru-san."

Really? Suzuki Satoru began to think in earnest.

It was not a high-priced item in YGGDRASIL. Rather, it was commonplace to use several of these rucksacks to organize the contents of one's inventory.

"Don't worry about it. No, if you're worried about it, then treat it as a loan. If you don't want it any more — yes, if we have to part, then return it to me."

"W-What if we're together forever?"

"Then you can just use it forever, right? Alright, take it."

Suzuki Satoru forced Keno to take the rucksack.

He should probably have checked to make sure there was nothing inside it before loaning it out. It was fairly common for YGGDRASIL players to forget magic items from slain monsters inside them.

After seeing her accept it without complaint, Satoru concluded that he ought to assume that the inhabitants of this world did not have inventory spaces. However, she was not surprised by the magical effects of the rucksack, because she had been told about such items in the past.

It feels like I could become something like a salesman if I could make good use of my inventory space.

However, things could get messy very quickly if he used a power which nobody had for profit.

Even someone who knew as little as Suzuki Satoru could understand how to use it with just a little thought. Surely there were people out there who were smarter and who would want it. If he became an information broker, it was very likely that he would expose himself as one of the undead, an enemy to the world. Therefore, he should try his best to avoid using this ability to obtain things.

He watched her carefully place various objects into the bag with a gentle look in his eyes. That was because the items inside it would not bump into or damage each other even if one just chuck them in at random. But surely a child who did not know that would pack them in that way.

While he wanted to help her, those were her family's treasures. It should not be interfered with by a third party, right? He would help if she asked for help, but that said, Keno was also undead. Her body would not tire, so it was very unlikely that she would seek help.

“Keno. What will you do with the weapons over there?”

Suzuki Satoru cast a spell to investigate to see what magic was imbued into them. All of them were mediocre and would be classified as low-class magic items in YGGDRASIL. While they were practically worthless, they were magic items from this world, and to Suzuki Satoru now they were extremely rare.

Incidentally, the national-treasure level gauntlet was a middle-class magical item. However, the breadth of the middle-class was quite broad, and it was among the topmost examples of that grouping.

“Can we... take them?”

“That will be your decision. But since they possess magical power, they should be magic items. If you don't mind, could you let me appraise them?”

After receiving Keno's permission, he cast <Appraisal Magic Item> to perform a more in-depth analysis.

As he thought, they were all nothing much. The armor's enchantment boosted defense, the weapons boosted attack power, and so on. They were all boring magic items.

“Keno, these items seem to contain enchantments that boost their effectiveness as battle gear. As for how much they're worth, I regret to say I'm not sure.”

Saying so, Suzuki Satoru grabbed a sword and essayed a swing with it. And then — the sword fell to the ground.

He saw Keno look over in shock as she heard the crashing sound of metal.

“W-What...”

“What’s the matter, Satoru-sama! Is something wrong with the sword?”

Had her tone reverted to its previous stiffness because of the sword?

“It, it’s nothing, I’m sorry. It seems my hand slipped. Hahaha, my palms must be sweaty!”

How the hell do bony hands sweat, Suzuki Satoru mocked himself as he casually put the sword back on the table.

The sword slipped from my hand before I knew it. Could it be that this body of mine can’t equip swords? What’s going on?

“Ah, Keno. Can you equip — no, hold it, no, that’s not it. Could you swing this sword?”

“Huh? This sword?”

“Ah, that’s right... but it seems a bit too large for you, Keno...”

Keno picked up the sword instantly.

Then, she swung it with a *whoosh*.

The child-sized Keno was swinging a sword that was as long as she was tall, but she did not lose her balance because of it.

“It feels really light. Is it because it’s got lightening magic inside it?”

“No... Keno, were you always very strong?”

“Huh?”

Keno’s expression told him that the answer was no, and after looking at her, Suzuki

Satoru thought *I see*. It would seem she had gained that strength after becoming undead.

There were restrictions on how much force a human being could exert, supposedly to keep them from tearing their own muscle fibers. Had those limitations been removed after becoming undead?

That might be possible, but perhaps there was another reason behind it.

"Keno, what race did you become after turning undead? While the people in the city became low- level Zombies, you're nothing like them. You're intelligent and you don't look rotted. Meanwhile, I am of the Overlord race, but you did not gain a bony body like mine."

"I, I don't get it..."

"Don't you think sorting out your race might help change the present situation? To that end, would you mind answering a few questions?"

While he did not know how far his YGGDRASIL knowledge could go in this world, learning Keno's race would probably not be a bad thing.

After some questioning, he arrived at what might be the right answer.

She was a Vampire.

However—

YGGDRASIL Vampires look more disgusting than this, right... or is she something like that Shalltear which Peroroncino made? Or is this a Vampire unique to this world? There's almost no change in her appearance before and after becoming undead, so could she be a special case?

Vampires in YGGDRASIL were typically frontliners — warrior types.

Perhaps that was why Keno's strength had increased, However, the fact that her height was frozen like this was a major downside. Having a short reach was very disadvantageous.

Maybe she should aim to be a Fencer... would it be wrong to let Keno decide how she

wants to develop herself?

Suzuki Satoru the backliner and Keno the frontliner. This was not a bad combination. However, it was a little embarrassing to use a child as a shield. He probably would not mind it in a game like YGGDRASIL—

Honestly. I used to be the sort of person who wasn't bothered by seeing the corpses of street orphans, since they showed up so often that they were nothing rare, but now...

Had he changed, or was he particularly interested in Keno?

“...I'll appraise this later on. Sorry to have disturbed you. You should hurry up and empty the treasury.”

Suzuki Satoru took this time to blow the dust in the treasury around so nobody could tell that anyone had entered.

“Now then, we've collected the contents of the Treasury — is there anything else you want to take along?”

“Yes. After this, all I need are a few small items from my room.”

She had reverted to polite speech at some point. Satoru thought, *You can be more casual, you know*, as he replied, “I trust you understand that we will be leaving this place soon. After that, someone might come here to take everything in the castle or to destroy everything inside it.”

Right now, he was still unsure why the people in this city had become undead. Perhaps there was some kind of plague that turned people undead. If that was the case, the people who came here might think that burning it all down would be the best way to deal with it.

While she had thought of that long ago, actually hearing Suzuki Satoru say it put a shocked look on Keno's face.

“You wouldn't want to be attacked by the undead either, right? Then it's possible that they might decide that all the undead in the city should be des...” Just as he was about to say “destroyed”

Suzuki Satoru suddenly realised that his phrasing was too provocative, and so he

changed his words. "...Should be eliminated. That would be the normal way of thinking, right? After all, to the living, doing so would get rid of the threat of whether or not the undead in this city would attack theirs."

"...Mm... I get what you mean."

"Therefore... since you've decided to leave, I want you to be mentally prepared for this. After all, today might be the last time you see this city. For that reason, Keno, while there's a limit to the things you can take with you, you must make sure that you don't regret the choices you make. Right now, I'm not sure whether the memories of the undead will fade away, but even if that happens, you must keep in mind the fact that you might forget this, and you must take good care of the things you want to preserve. As long as you preserve them... mm, it'll become one of your unforgettable memories."

Suzuki Satoru took out a picture.

It was a memorial picture that had been taken when the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick had still been called an underground tomb — in other words, when it had first been conquered.

What he took out was a group photo of all the group's members.

"Yes, something that will never be forgotten."

"What's this?"

"These are my friends. It's a picture we took together." Suzuki Satoru could not help but smile as he heard Keno's question. "Oh yes, if we have time during our journeys, I'll tell you about the adventures I had with my friends."

"Sure!"

Suzuki Satoru chuckled as he heard her cheerful reply.

"Alright! Then go collect some things that you want to preserve as memories, Keno... unfortunately, your body will probably not grow any more now that you're undead, unless you're a special undead being that I've never seen before. Therefore, you should be able to wear your clothes for a long time."

"Sure!... Huh? But should I feel happy about this?"

“Isn’t eternal youth the dream of all women?”

“I’d be glad if I could grow a little more...”

“Is that so?”

“It isn’t?”

As a man, Suzuki Satoru did not quite understand. However, she might have some resistance to the idea of looking like a child and never growing again.

“Alright, then why don’t you start by picking out clothes?”

“Alright! I will!”

That said, I don’t think a princess is going to have any clothes suitable for travelling. As for me, well, I obviously don’t have any.

In YGGDRASIL, it was perfectly natural for people to walk around fully armed and armored, but given her attire and the undead he had seen in the city — in other words, ordinary civilian attire — his robe stood out too much. That being the case, he would need to change into clothes that could better blend into an ordinary town, but he did not have any unassuming, ordinary garments.

Even if he did, it would be weak gear with low data capacity. It might be very dangerous once he got into a fight.

In other words, he needed something with acceptable defense and toughness, while still looking plain. And with Keno included, he would need two sets of that clothing.

After checking Keno’s HP values with <Life Essence>, he could tell that they were very low. She might even end up getting killed by the splash damage from an area-effect spell.

That said, I don’t really want to fight in battles which are big enough that she might get caught up in them...

Unfortunately, Suzuki Satoru was not gifted at divination magic, and even if he could maintain a certain level of alertness with magic, he was not confident that he could protect against 100% of enemy sneak attacks.

It would probably be best to just directly give her items like that. However, if he gave her a high-level item and it made others target her instead, that would be the opposite of what he wanted.

There's too many things I need to think about. Maybe I should prepare two sets of gear, one for when we approach a town and one for when we're travelling... no, if I'm not mistaken, I think I've got a robe of rapid gear switching... forget it, I won't think about this for now.

"Let's go to your room, Keno."

"Alright... er, but... this sort of thing, ah, no, er, maybe I should just ask. At the risk of offending you, you *are* a man, aren't you, Satoru-san?"

"But of course. Granted, I don't look the part."

I'm clearly speaking with Suzuki Satoru's voice, why'd you ask me a weird question like that all of a sudden? Are there women in this world with voices like this?

"Ah, this is kind of rude to say to a benefactor, but my room has always been forbidden to all men except my father — ahem, that's the rule that was laid down."

Oh? Suzuki Satoru was somewhat surprised.

She might be a child, but she was still the princess of a country, and it would seem that these rules were quite strict.

"I see. Well, a rule is a rule. I'll just wait outside, then... you can handle things by yourself, right, Keno?"

He thought of the undead in maid uniforms inside the castle. There should have been a maid to help Keno with her daily tasks.

"Um, that's not a problem either... oh yes, as my savior, it's only natural for me to invite you into my room. No, please step inside... or would you rather not?"

Keno tugged on Suzuki Satoru's robe as she asked him that question.

"Ah, no, I've got no reason to refuse."

He had only said he would not be entering Keno's room because she had said no strangers were allowed into it. In truth, Suzuki Satoru did not mind going inside or staying outside.

He used *<Fly>* to reach Keno's room and followed her inside to take a look around. It was much classier than Suzuki Satoru's room, but in turn it paled in comparison to Momonga's room.

However, once she opened her cabinet, he found a great deal of dresses inside. That certainly seemed like a princess's room. However, their colors and decorations were much simpler than those of YGGDRASIL; or rather, YGGDRASIL's clothes were much more lavish.

Keno rifled through the dresses — although some had already become discolored — and then she turned her head back in Suzuki Satoru's direction to ask him a question.

"Which do you think is more suitable?" Who was the one who had once said, "which do you like better" coming from a woman's mouth was one of the hardest questions in the world? Was it *Touch Me*?

Suzuki Satoru very much wanted to say "I have terrible aesthetic sense, please don't ask me." But she had asked him because she trusted him, and he owed her a serious answer.

"While I think all of them suit you very well, taking them all will be very troublesome. For instance, if there's an organization behind that undead being, they might send backup over, which would expose your presence. And we'll be heading off on a journey, so I don't think anyone's going to walk around in outfits like that, right?"

"So that's how it is — no, is it?"

He did not know the common practices of this world, so all Suzuki Satoru could say was "most likely." However, he felt that it was probably not too far from the truth.

"Also, you can't go around dressed as a member of the royal family if you want to keep a low profile — oh yes, Keno. I'm sorry, but a problem came to mind. Do people in other cities, or perhaps other countries, know your face?"

"I'm not sure. Maybe someone might have an impression of me, uh, I guess. The royals of other countries should know me. I remember there was a portrait exchange once."

"Is that so... while you should probably be careful, it has been quite a while since you became undead. In that case, it's not likely that you'll run into people like that. Alright, we'll go with that. Leaving aside the question of whether or not you should wear a dress while travelling or what we said just now, you should go collect the mementos you want to keep. In any case, if we come back after several years and nobody's cleaned the place out, we can take everything here with us. For now, just pick a few dresses that you like best and let's go."

No matter what, surely they could not keep an eye on this place for so many years.

Keno took a while — slightly longer than Suzuki Satoru had expected — to pick out four dresses, and then she began tidying up the smaller things in her room.

Because moving anything would leave traces and clue people in to the fact that something had been there once, she decided to shuffle around everything in the vicinity to cover up those marks.

"Is that all you need to bring? In that case, we'll put your parents and maids in a room in the sewer. That way, they might be able to escape the attention of anyone who comes to this city."

"Alright... that should be... the best way."

"If you know of any other way to avoid outsiders finding their hiding place, we can go with your suggestion."

Keno shook her head.

Then there was nothing for it. They would simply have to make do.

"Now then, Satoru-san."

"Hm?"

"Since we'll be heading out, could you help me cut my hair?"

"Eh?"

The change in topic had come as such a surprise that Suzuki Satoru responded in an oafish way.

"Um, it's like this, please look at this." Having cast <Fly>, Keno glided over to one side of the room and nimbly retrieved a book from a shelf. "This is Book 3 of the Chronicles of the Prince of Phenia. In this book, when the princess set out on a journey, she cut her long hair."

Keno looked a little embarrassed, but her eyes were shining bright.

"Ahem. Alright, I don't mind..."

Just as Suzuki Satoru was waffling over whether it would be alright to cut her hair for that reason, Keno came back in front of Suzuki Satoru with a pair of scissors.

"Then, please do the honors!"

"I, ah... I've never cut anyone's hair before, so let me get this out of the way first, I'm not confident at all in being able to give you a pretty haircut. Maybe if I had hair clippers I could do a passable job... But before that, I have something that I want to tell you."

Suzuki Satoru took the scissors, picked up a lock of Keno's hair and snipped off part of it. The severed hair landed in Suzuki Satoru's hand, where it aged and degraded as though several hundred years had passed for it, until it became a puff of ash, vanishing cleanly just like the undead did when they were destroyed.

"Keno, I'm going to cast a spell on you. Don't resist it, alright?"

"Eh? Alright. It should be fine."

He returned the scissors to her, and while still holding the lock of Keno's hair, he cast the offensive spell <Ray of Negative Energy>. While negative energy damaged the living, it would heal the undead instead.

Upon taking the magical "attack", Keno's hair — to be precise, the lock in Suzuki Satoru's hand, which had been trimmed — regained its original length.

That was how it was.

In the moment that one became undead, one's appearance was fixed. In that case, what would happen to people who were missing limbs or otherwise maimed when they became undead? That question flashed through his mind, but he could not think of an

answer and it would have been pointless anyway, so he banished the thought from his mind.

“Keno, I think cutting your hair is considered damage to you.”

“Ehhh? Really!?”

At least he could save himself the trouble of cleaning up the cut hair.

“So even if I mess up, I can start anew over and over again... So I’m just going to do a careless job this time round.”

“Carelessly!?”

Suzuki Satoru ignored Keno’s cry of surprise and cast *<Life Essence>*, then cut Keno’s long hair to shoulder-length.

“It’s fine. The damage is minimal, to the point where you could ignore it.”

“Eh? Ehhhhh!?”

It was only after she felt the hair behind her that she managed to calm down.

“Satoru-san! When you said you were going to cut it carelessly I got the shock of my life!”

After hearing the reproachful tone in Keno’s voice (“Eh? Should I apologize, then?”) Suzuki Satoru began to seriously consider the matter. Nothing good would come of ruining his relationship with a future travelling companion.

“It was my fault, Keno.”

“Ah, no, it’s alright, ahem... It’s okay now...”

Then why were you so eager to blame me just now? Suzuki Satoru barely stopped himself from saying.

Keno’s just a child... huh? A child? Don’t tell me she’s a senior lady?

Suzuki suddenly began thinking about that... but abandoned it in the end. In any event,

he trimmed the rest of her hair to roughly shoulder length. Then, he used a borrowed comb — truth be told, he had no confidence in himself at all — to comb out the hair.

“It’s done. Or rather... I think it’s done.”

Keno walked in front of the changing mirror, but it was covered in dust and could not show Keno’s image. Just as she was about to wipe the mirror, her hand stopped halfway as she remembered the reason why she was sustaining a <Fly> spell. Then, she turned around to Suzuki Satoru.

“How does it look?”

“It suits you. Mm, it becomes you,” Suzuki Satoru answered.

“Really? That makes me happy.”

Keno gave him a winsome smile.

She seemed to be in good spirits. Suzuki Satoru knew nothing about what was pretty, what was not, the finer points of women’s hairstyles and the like. But it would seem what he had said had played it safe.

“N-Now then, let’s move on to the next step.”

◇ ◇ ◇

After taking Keno’s parents and a maid in the room in the sewer that had been Keno’s base, he shackled the door with rusty chains so it would not open.

While mindless undead like Zombies could not open the doors on their own, it was probably best to bar it just in case.

Keno had mixed feelings as she looked at the room door, and Suzuki Satoru spoke to her.

“Alright, next up... how do you want to travel, Keno?”

“Huh?”

“We are undead. We do not tire, we don’t need to eat, and we don’t need to sleep. We

can head out right now without taking anything else with us. But when that happens, people will start asking questions when we enter villages or cities. Therefore, I'd like to do something that won't arouse suspicion."

"Like say, dragging lots of luggage around with us?"

"Won't that make people suspicious?"

In truth, Suzuki Satoru had no idea how the people in this world travelled. Therefore, he had no idea how to avoid suspicion.

Keno turned her head aside and said she did not know.

"In that case, which do you prefer, between taking a carriage or going on foot?"

"I'm not bothered by either... it's fine. We don't have the concept of fatigue, after all. Ah, but I walk really slowly, so..."

"It's fine, don't worry. I'll match your pace, Keno."

That said, since they were undead, could they not just run at full speed all the time? That said, surely seeing an adult run around with a little girl by his side would leave a bad impression on others.

"I'll go get a carriage, then..."

"But what about the horses... hm — how should we get one?"

"Ah — that's true. As for horses..."

Suzuki Satoru looked out the window. He could not see any sign of horses, but he could see Zombies. Even if there were horses, they would probably be Horse Zombies, and the other people in the city would not suffer a Zombie horse pulling a carriage through a city. That was definitely out. Suddenly, just then, Suzuki Satoru had an idea.

"Don't worry. I'll do something about the horses. Just relax and leave it to me. The problem is the carriage. Covered wagons, cargo wagons, box wagons, on what grounds are we going on our journey?"

"Huh?"

"Are we going to be a princess and her magic caster follower? In that case, then perhaps our country has a kind of pumpkin-shaped carriage. That might be the best scenario for us."

Suzuki Satoru had said so in a slightly joking tone, but Keno nervously said, "...What about a kind magic caster and his follower?"

"...Just in case, I want to check but, am I the kind magic caster in question, while you are the follower?"

"Yes."

"Then that suggestion is rejected."

Suzuki Satoru did not think he could make full use of Keno as his follower to put on an act. "In that case," Keno said, and then she fell into thought. After that, she absentmindedly spoke up.

"How about friends?"

"Friends, huh... so we're travelling companions... alright, our backstory is that we're friends?"

After taking the difference in their ages into consideration, a lot of people would probably find it strange that they were friends. However, Suzuki Satoru did not feel that way. He had often seen kids who had just graduated elementary school working alongside him, and it was very hard to tell someone's age by their appearances in YGGDRASIL.

In fact, the leader of a guild which had rivalled Ainz Ooal Gown had been a child in real life. And on the flip side, there were players who looked like kids, but whose actual age was over double that of Suzuki Satoru's. When he heard them talk about their grandchildren, Suzuki Satoru froze in confusion for a moment. He still looked back on those days with nostalgia.

To that Suzuki Satoru, there was nothing strange about treating Keno as his friend.

Of course, Suzuki Satoru knew that Keno was weaker than him, so the two of them were probably protector and charge. However, it was very common in YGGDRASIL for experienced players to team up with newbie players to powerlevel them, as well as

partying up with non-combatant crafter party members to run around.

"Still, we need an explanation that will convince people we're friends when we enter towns. I guess we can take our time thinking it up during our journey."

"Alright... although, when you mentioned a pumpkin-shaped carriage, did you mean the edible kind of pumpkin? Is it a carriage that can be used as emergency rations when we're hungry?"

"Ah, no, it's just shaped that way..."

Suzuki Satoru felt that verbally explaining would be troublesome, and so he rummaged through his inventory.

"I wonder if I have one..."

He took out a photo album taken with his friends.

Suzuki Satoru flipped quickly through it.

The memories recalled by the many pictures filled Suzuki Satoru with nostalgia. While part of him wanted to keep staring at them, he forced himself not to do so and continued going through the pages.

The photo he was looking for was not in this album. Suzuki Satoru switched to another one, and then a third.

"This one. Keno, look at this picture. The carriage is in the same frame as one of my female friends."

Keno pressed in from the side, and then her jaw dropped.

"A Slime in a dress... a woman? Is she a Slime Princess?"

Upon the wagon was a princess in a white dress, holding a shield aloft — Bukubukuchagama. It had been a picture to commemorate the completion of the carriage, but Bukubukuchagama had ended up becoming the subject of the photo. That also showed which of them had a more striking appearance.

"Hahaha, I'll tell you about this during our trip. Now, slightly below is the pumpkin

carriage. I heard that shape is the kind girls dream about. That's why she's so happy."

Although, her brother had once muttered, "You can't call her a girl at that age..."

"..."

Keno looked over, visibly disturbed.

"You mean, like bad dreams?"

"Hahahaha... wait, what?" Suzuki Satoru was confused.

He had laughed out of genuine mirth, but Suzuki Satoru felt a sense of discomfort as his joy was quashed.

Don't tell me the undead emotional suppression doesn't just apply to negative emotions... no, when I think about it, that is the case. Not needing to eat or drink isn't bad, but that also means you can't eat buffing food. It's got its good and bad points...

"What's wrong? Satoru-san?"

Perhaps it was because his worries had been suddenly quelled, but Suzuki Satoru responded to Keno's question with a gentle "It's fine."

Even so, it didn't completely suppress my happiness. There ought to be a way to live on while seeking joy.

"Right, then let's start looking for carriage. Ideally, we want an old traveller's carriage, the kind that doesn't make people suspicious when you use it."

"Yes!"

"Keno, when you told me not to take other people's property, doesn't that mean taking their carriage would be a bad thing?"

Keno thought about it for a while, and then answered:

"It'll be fine because we're paying for it."

Then, she raised her rucksack.

“I see... In that case, can I borrow some money from you, Keno?”

“Huh?”

“As I showed you earlier, I have ample funds. However, all of them are gold coins that aren’t in circulation throughout this country. It seems dangerous to try and pay with them.”

“Is that so? Well, if you feel that way, then I can lend — no, I can offer... give you some.”

“No, that won’t do, Keno. To some extent, that money is your inheritance from your parents. You can’t just hand it over to others.”

“I, I see.”

“While you might not be able to agree under these circumstances, that also includes the relics of your ancestors. You mustn’t spend it blindly, okay?”

“I understand.”

Keno might have said that, but her expression suggested that she did not quite get it. Perhaps Suzuki Satoru was simply forcing his views on her.

“...Therefore, can I borrow some money? I’ll pay you back until I sell the gems I have on hand.”

“Alright!”

“Good. Then we’ll split the cost for buying the wagon. We’re friends, so we’ll put up the same amount.”

“Of course!”

“Right! Then let’s go find a carriage!”

“Sure thing!”

Suzuki Satoru responded to Keno with great gusto, and the two of them wandered around the streets.

Along the way, Suzuki Satoru put the gold coins from this world which he had borrowed from Keno into his pocket dimension.

While it was stored in a separate location from the YGGDRASIL coins, they did not seem to count against his weight limit. If they did, then he would not be able to store anything in his inventory. This was a perfectly rational design decision for a game, but he ought to be in a real world now.

It's really handy, but it kind of ruins realism in a place like this... am I really not in a game?

Although his undead body had confirmed to Suzuki Satoru that he was not in a game, the handiness of his inventory made him feel like he was still in a game. It felt unpleasant, like the game was overwriting the real world.

Ultimately, however, Suzuki Satoru would not get an answer, no matter how much he thought.

More importantly—

There are still many other things to consider.

They had found several carriages, but all of them were heavily worn out from age and looked like they would crumble if one tried to use them. He did not want to waste too much time, but searching alone would have been dangerous, so he brought Keno with him on his search.

After a long time, they finally found a serviceable covered wagon in a small shed adjoining a large house. The strange thing was that this shed had a jail of some sort in its basement, and there were countless female Zombies inside the jail. It was an insoluble mystery, but Suzuki Satoru pretended that he had not seen it. After all, no matter what he did now, it would be too late.

Suzuki Satoru pushed the wagon with his superhuman strength to test it out. The wagon creaked, but the axles did not feel like they would break straight away. It would seem the wagon had been enchanted in its key areas.

But they didn't enchant the whole thing. Why is that?

Still, it was pointless to think about such things. Suzuki Satoru created a <Gate> in

front of the wagon and began to push. Keno went to Suzuki Satoru's side and helped him push. The idea of summoning the Griffin Lord had come up, but he had asked her to save her power.

While it was hard to say if Keno's strength was of much assistance, the two of them pushed the wagon outside the city. He kept the <Gate> open, then grabbed the shirt of the guard from earlier, who was still wandering around in the vicinity, dragged him over, then pushed him through the <Gate> before ending the spell.

"Now then, I'll prepare a substitute for a horse."

What Suzuki Satoru took out was a majestic statue of a horse with its forelegs in the air. He placed the Statue of Animal: Warhorse on the ground, and it instantly expanded into a mighty equine.

"Wow! That's an amazing horse! We didn't even have anything this great in our home! You're amazing, Satoru-san!"

The smile on Keno's face might have been the first to match her age that he had seen to date. After seeing her honest reaction, Suzuki Satoru chuckled.

Suzuki Satoru ordered the golem horse to move to the front of the wagon, where he tied it to the wagon with ropes.

He sat on the driver's seat and ordered it forward, and the golem horse complied.

Only then was Suzuki Satoru relieved.

This relief was because the horse conjured from an item could be used to pull a wagon.

Suzuki Satoru had never sat on a horse or even touched one before, so he should not have been able to make an ordinary horse in this world pull a wagon. But fortunately enough, that problem had been solved. Suzuki Satoru could not help but be awed by his quick thinking.

"Now then, Keno, let's head to the neighboring city first and see how things are there. Then, we'll solve the mystery of the zombification someday and find a way to save everyone!"

OVERLORD The Paladin of the Holy Light

OVERLORD The Vampire Princess of the Lost Country



オーバーロード

15

3章 五年の準備

CHAPTER 3

FIVE YEARS OF PREPARATION

1

Night Liches were beings who had absorbed a great deal of mana, and by doing so transcended the state of Elder Liches. Such occurrences were rare even throughout history, for which the living were grateful.

This was because Night Liches were very powerful.

They were well-versed in using incredibly high-tier spells beyond the realm of humanity — the so-called sixth tier. They were on par with even aged Dragons in a fight. In addition, they also possessed many special abilities, hordes of undead followers, a great degree of intelligence, and resided in many-layered impregnable bastions.

They were capable of ruling nations, as undead kings.

In truth, there were three known Night Liches—

The Dragon Night Lich, Guphandera=Argoros.

The Titan Night Lich, Siyern.

The nameless Night Lich, a lord of the shadows known as Fear.

They ruled a domain that was the size of a small country, and the surrounding nations knew them as figures of dread.

For that reason, the name “Night Lich” was only ever spoken in hushed, frightened tones. One could say that they were mythical mythological beings comparable to natural disasters.

And right now, in front of one of those terrifying Night Liches, the one who secluded

himself from the world and remained laired in darkness — Kunivela — a pair of figures suddenly appeared, as though from out of nowhere.

One of them was in a robe. The other was also in a robe, but their statures were very different from each other, as though they were an adult and child.

Even the undead Kunivela was briefly confused when this mysterious duo suddenly appeared in front of him without any forewarning.

His research had been fruitful, he possessed vast magical knowledge, and he was quite famous in his field. He understood that there was probably a ninth tier of spells in the world — a fact that many people in the world probably did not even know. Yet even he had no idea what had happened.

Kunivela made his lair in a house in a destroyed city, in a cellar he had dug out below it.

Nobody, not even the organization, should have known about this place. And he had undead minions deployed throughout the city. How had they evaded their eyes and passed all his magical traps to reach this place? After all, Kunivela had also used divination magic to ward himself.

Still, Kunivela had not sensed anything before they suddenly appeared before him.

However, his confusion swiftly receded. What replaced it was fear.

In this world, Night Liches were some of the mightiest beings in existence. Just as superior beings looked down on others, it would be impossible for them to be afraid of others. This was particularly true for those people who understood his overwhelming power.

Assuming, of course, that this had happened a year ago.

A single thought appeared in Kunivela's mind.

—It was, "They're trying to kill me."

He had no intention of speaking with the two people who had suddenly appeared. Kunivela immediately cast a spell. He did not choose an offensive or defensive spell, but <Teleportation>.

He abandoned this city and teleported to a distant base that he thought was safe — he had thought this place was safe too — without any hesitation.

Fighting was not an option. That was the only choice he could not take. Actually doing so would have been utter foolishness...

It was true that neither of them emitted an aura of might. He could not even sense any mana from them.

But that was why they were so fearsome.

Under normal circumstances, he would have greeted them with an attack spell to teach them the foolishness of standing in front of him.

However, these two people had broken through the Night Lich Kunivela's surveillance network. For that reason, it was only sensible to assume the two of them were so far beyond Kunivela that he could not even sense them.

Surely the undead of the organization would have mocked Kunivela if they heard that the Night Lich Kunivela had abandoned everything and immediately chosen to flee. However, he would only have drawn that reaction a year ago.

Right now, the organization's members would unanimously back Kunivela's choice and would have vouched for the rightness of his decision.

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There was an organization called "Corpus of the Abyss."

It was a group composed of undead magic casters. Originally, it had been formed to work for their mutual benefit and avoid conflicts.

The reason for that was because when the undead — as beings with unlimited lifespans — studied magic together, friction tended to develop.

Without the three great drives — for food, rest, and sex — undead invariably developed other, powerful desires, and in the case of undead magic casters, they generally tended to thirst for knowledge. For that reason, once a conflict over knowledge began, it would tend to escalate. Neither party would stop until it became

a battle of extermination which would end with one side being annihilated.

If the three great drives of the living were concentrated into a single urge, surely that single desire would become uncontrollable. It was very common for the undead to be destroyed in this way, to the point where the living could destroy both parties while they were absorbed in their feud.

For that reason, undead eventually emerged who understood that it was wiser to make trades and to cooperate within reason, rather than fight to mutual extinction over knowledge and magic items. In the end, a list of names was made.

It was an unenchanted stone tablet that was inscribed with the participants' names through some unknown magic, which would later be known as the "Granisle Inscription."

At that time, it only contained the names of four Night Liches and three Elder Liches. There were few rules and rulebreakers would be ganged up on by the others. Such was the looseness of their relationship.

But 200 years after that, it gradually became a complete organization.

Thanks to an increasing number of undead members, the seven grew by 48, becoming a large organization with 55 members, with the original seven each being difficulty rating 150 undead creatures.

However, very few people knew of this organization.

Its members could be roughly divided into two types.

One kind cultivated their influence among the living and used them to achieve their aims. The other had nothing to do with the living, working quietly for their own aims in the world.

Very few people thought like the former, so most of their members fell into the latter category. As a result, they did not cause many ripples in living society.

As for those who planned to build their influence among the living, along with it came an increase in the number of enemies. In particular, since the undead were the enemy of everything that lived, there were times where the living would form international alliances to exterminate them. Because of this, there were even fewer members of the

former groups. Of course, there were also those who had put down roots in the darkness of the world of the living, but such skilled undead were few and far between.

In the end, “Corpus of the Abyss” became a group that existed only in rumors. The reason why they did not try to compel the aforementioned three Night Liches to join them was to avoid them gaining attention when they did so.

That was why it took so long for the problem to be discovered.

The first to notice that problem was one of the oldest members of the inner circle. He was one of the founders of the organization, Benjeli Ansis, also known as “Abyss”.

He was a six-armed, two-headed Night Lich, who was proficient with sixth tier arcane spells and sixth tier spells from other traditions, and a fearsome being that humanity could not overcome. If he had been willing to emerge into the spotlight, the aforementioned three Night Liches would have become four instead.

That day, he had been heading for the stronghold of Granz Locke, a fellow member of the inner circle and a practitioner of the eighth tier.

After paying various prices, he had intended to learn how Granz had reached the eighth tier. But Granz had not appeared that day. Therefore, Benjeli went to Granz’s stronghold.

It was not unusual for the undead, who had no maximum lifespan, to lose themselves in research. *Granz must have been that way*, Benjeli had thought as he reached his destination. However, as Benjeli dismounted from his Undead Dragon, his bodyguard cum mount, he froze in place because of the strange mood in the air at Granz’s stronghold.

Granz had dozens of Elder Liches on guard duty and drove them hard as his servants. Usually, one of them would have immediately appeared to show Benjeli the way after he showed up, But nobody came even after he waited for a while.

Benjeli summoned his own minions and cautiously entered the stronghold, where he immediately realised what had happened.

Everything had been taken. His research and his wealth was gone without a trace.

The undead were the enemies of the living, so it was not unusual for the undead to be

destroyed. Even such powerful undead beings were occasionally killed off by even more powerful living beings. But the strange thing was that there were no signs of battle. It seemed as though he had suddenly gone outside.

Granz was a Night Lich. In other words, he was of the highest order of undead. Could someone like that have been destroyed without any room for resistance?

With a strange unease in his heart, Benjeli checked the status of all of the organization's members.

And then — the organization trembled.

Of its 55 members, 21 of them were completely uncontactable. This was not just limited to members of the outer circle, but even founding members of the inner circle.

Before anyone had realized it, roughly 40% of the group's membership had been destroyed. This chilled the spines of the undead, which should not have known the meaning of fear; the idea that their members — who could destroy nations — had not even left any messages or information behind meant that they had been unilaterally obliterated.

As powerful individuals, they could each take down a nation by themselves. Everyone was possessed of such arrogance, which was why they rarely worked with each other and "Corpus of the Abyss" had never worked together as a group. However, they no longer had the luxury to do so.

Everyone shared their information, looked out for each other, and joined their forces. Once, this organization had many absentees in their meetings that were spaced years apart, but now they all met on a monthly basis.

Even so, their numbers continued to dwindle.

Some unknown being was slowly, gradually hunting down the organization's members.

These beings, who were more than a century old, knew fear for the first time.

At this point, they no longer cared about face or reputation.

They had started meeting on a monthly basis at first, but as their numbers fell, they were now meeting once every two days. Seeing everyone present at those meetings

reassured them, but if someone was missing, they would worry that they would be next, and thus they would live each day in fear. Some of them had even started staying together.

Even though they tried their hardest to gather information, all they found were mysteries.

They did not know why they were being attacked. Was it because of hatred or revenge or some other emotion? Or was it for the fruits of their research, or material goods like money and the like? But the most important question was—

—Who was doing this?

Their aims were irrelevant now. The new conclusion for their current course of action was an unconditional surrender followed by begging for their unlivess. While some people had suggested fighting at first, they had all lost the will to fight at this point.

The organization of Night Liches known as “Corpus of the Abyss” was now in the grip of an unknown terror.



It was under these circumstances that Kunivela had decided to cast <Teleportation>.

He had not chosen to surrender because he thought he could flee. Rather, it was because he needed to organize his thoughts enough to converse with them. In addition, he did not want to speak with them by himself. *It would be better to withdraw first and then surrender as a group*, Kunivela thought.

However, a moment after the <Teleportation> took effect, Kunivela froze.

He was still in front of these two mysterious people. The <Teleportation> had not taken effect. Perhaps some spell had negated it.

Kunivela, as one of the undead, had already witnessed many things he had never seen before just today. The fear rose inside him once again, and his eyes went wide as he studied the pair before him.

The taller robed figure extended a hand.

It was a skeletal hand.

The names of many skeletal magic casters flashed through his mind, but they were all oddballs. None of them could have defeated Kunivela the Night Lich. So what was this being — as his thoughts reached that point, they froze.

He had been dominated.

He could not even resist it.

Kunivela the Night Lich had actually been dominated like a Zombie or a Skeleton. His mind and soul had already acknowledged the being before him as his controller — his Master. What should have been an object of fear had become a Master to whom he owed his loyalty.

He could tell that this was a skill to dominate the undead, one which he possessed as well. However, that skill was only effective on undead weaker than himself — which meant that his Master was significantly more powerful than Kunivela. Once under his dominion, Kunivela would have no chance to shake it off so long as the other party did not want to relinquish control. All that was left now was to beg him — his Master — to show mercy.

Master pulled back his face-concealing hood.

It revealed a bony skull. Based on the skeletal hand he had just extended, it was not a mask, but his actual face.

There must have been some meaning behind not killing Kunivela but choosing to control him. *It would be best if it was because he felt that it would be a shame to kill him — that it would be better to keep him alive*, the dominated Kunivela thought.

“Now then, start by — handing over all your research notes and your treasure.”

“Hand it over!”

The smaller figure to the side removed its hood too.

It had blonde hair and red eyes.

She looked like a human child, but she was apparently undead. Given her intelligence

and appearance, he concluded that she was a Vampire that had been spawned from a human. As she was a companion of his Master, he could not bring himself to harbor any hostility towards her.

“I hear and obey. Now I shall begin with my treasure.”

Kunivela used a key to unlock the treasury in his room and took out all the sacks within.

There were 15 of them in total. Each of them contained a thousand gold coins, for a total of 15,000 coins — weighing 150 kilograms in all. While the undead did not directly need money, there were times where some of the living were willing to deal with them, typically people from the dark side of society. Completing their requests would reward them with gold, and gold was also a valuable item when dealing with them, so he had naturally saved up a lot of it.

There was also a bag of gemstones in addition to those. The table also had spell scrolls, enchanted wands, and other magic items.

“I also have three other bases in addition to this one. The other half of my assets are located there.”

Since he was being dominated, he truthfully revealed the location of all his hidden treasure in order to maximize the gain for his Master.

“Hoho, that’s quite a lot.”

“It really is!”

“...Home Invader No. 2... don’t you think you should show a little restraint? You really let yourself go, didn’t you? While I’ve been thinking it all this time... I have to say it today. Shouldn’t you behave more like a princess? You were when I first met you.”

“—Number One. We’ve been travelling together for five years, you know? After going through so much, even the undead will change to some extent.”

“Umu. I have my doubts about that. Logically speaking, the undead should not be changing on a mental level — does that also mean they’ll never grow? So does that mean this is the way your personality’s always been, Number Two?”

“It doesn’t seem that way to me... and when you get down to it, it’s all because of you, Number One. What with all that impossible magic, magic items that are each worth an entire kingdom, and summoning monsters that look like they could level an entire country by themselves...”

Master ignored the chattering girl and opened a sack, then took several gold coins out of it.

“...So they’re all trading currency, then? That helps me out a lot. After all, exchanging a large sum of money is quite troublesome.”

Calculating the gold content of each country’s gold coins was very troublesome, and so in order to facilitate easy trades, Kunivela only used these coins.

“Was that why you’ve been using recast YGGDRASIL coins all this while then, Number One?”

“You’ve seen them before, haven’t you? That’s exactly it, Number Two. Now then, on to the heart of the matter. My first question is, what are the movements of your organization? How cautious are they of me?”

“We are wary of you, of course, but everyone is basically prepared to surrender unconditionally at this point. It seems some of them have also fled the group.”

“Name them.”

Kunivela recited a list of former members who had run away. There were half a dozen in total.

“What do you think, Number Two?”

The girl consulted the piece of paper in her hand and nodded.

“It seems two of them got away. What should we do, Number One?”

“Hunt them down and kill them. If we don’t rip them out by the roots, we’ll never be able to get a good night’s sleep.”

“—That’s wonderful, Number One! You’ve gotten better at telling jokes! See, the undead can grow too! Next we’ll have to work on your naming sense!”

“...I was not joking.”

“Ah, um...”

Master did not speak. The girl bit her lip and peeked at Master.

Rudeness to the Master was intolerable, but Kunivela had not been permitted to attack.

And also...

Were the two who escaped lucky or unlucky? Given the conversation from just now, they don't sound like they're going to spare them...

“Are the names I pick really in such bad taste?”

“...Frankly speaking, they are. Ah, but Heteromorphic Zoo was pretty good. It was funny.”

“Funny, huh...”

“Still, Blondie was terrible!” The girl planted her hands on her hips. “Those guards were giving me weird looks back then and it was so embarrassing!”

“But they didn't say anything...”

“That's because names have different meanings among different races, and being killed for making fun of someone's name isn't anything new. People are more sensitive to that problem in cities with mixed populations. But they couldn't hide what they were thinking...”

“But we didn't go there again after that—”

“—Excuse me, Master?” Kunivela asked nervously. Both their eyes — Kunivela only cared about his Master's gazes turned to him. “All the undead magic casters who belong to 'Corpus of the Abyss' are willing to surrender to you, Master. Does it please you?”

“Oh, yes, let's settle things on this end first. While it's bad form to answer a question with another question, I still have to ask: why do I have to accept it?”

Kunivela gulped at his Master's doubt.

"You lot might say that, but you'll definitely harbor resentment in your hearts. Why should I spare you? Only by tearing you out by the roots will I eliminate future problems."

"We would never do such a thing. We could not even think of defying—"

"—Ah, I've heard enough of that. Then what would happen if you learned our weakness?"

He could not hide anything from Master's demands.

"If it benefited us to destroy our foe once we seized his weakness, we would do so."

"You see?"

"Only with respect to elements that Master deems harmful by taking us as vassals we will surely be of use. For instance, I can guarantee that we can outperform any other think-tank as long as we work together and of course we can serve as troops against your enemies. Master while your power is matchless surely numbers can serve as an advantage—"

Kunivela desperately struggled to demonstrate his worth.

"Hm, that is true. I do have something that needs researching. But according to your colleagues which I eliminated earlier, nobody can do it. Is that true?"

Everyone had a rough idea of who was studying what within the group. They shared their information to avoid feuding over resources due to duplicating each others' efforts. However, there was no guarantee that each person was telling the truth about the contents of their research. Kunivela himself was conducting secret research of his own.

Perhaps this hidden material could be used as bargaining material. If he said, "everyone has their own secret topics," then Master would need to go and question everyone, which would mean he might step up his attacks against the organization. Perhaps the others had considered that too, which was why they had chosen to be killed without saying a word. That might have been why Master had not brought the topic up.

“—Then, what if we offered up a fixed sum to you every year? With a great deal of money, you could hire more of the living to help carry out research—”

“I have no need for money.”

“Mm.”

The girl beside him nodded,

“Then, then why did you have me hand over my treasures first?”

Was that not very strange? In response to Kunivela’s question, Master shrugged nonchalantly.

“I was just looking for any rare items you had among it. Ah, and I also wanted to savor the adventurer’s spirit of gaining treasure after beating a dungeon.”

Kunivela could not help but wonder what he meant by “adventurer’s spirit.”

Was he going to wipe all of them out just for that?

Surely he would have fought back with all his might if he had not been dominated. Of course, that was nothing more than a pointless fantasy.

“I have more questions for you. Since you are under my control, will the other members of your organization come to save you, or will this stronghold self-destruct after a while — that is to say, is there any demerit to us in staying here?”

It was hard to explain what those demerits were.

If Kunivela vanished, the others would assume that something had happened to him. But who on earth would risk themselves like this? Perhaps all of them might come, but probably not to rescue Kunivela or to attack Master. It was more likely that they would offer surrender or ask to negotiate.

In any event, there was nothing which would be immediately unfavorable to Master. However, one could not overlook any disadvantageous developments which might emerge after this.

“There are none. However, that is only for the next day or so. If several days pass —

the more time passes, the more likely someone will think something is off. In addition, there are still dominated undead in this base. What about them? If they are still around, they might launch an attack.”

Kunivela might have been dominated, but that was just him. The undead he had created were a different matter. They would probably carry out their orders to kill all intruders the moment they saw Master.

On the other hand, now that Kunivela was dominated, the undead that were under Kunivela’s domination would be freed of it. Those undead were probably trying to flee right now and would not attempt to begin hostilities.

“Ah, if it’s just the undead here, then I can deal with all of them easily even if they attack me all at once. There’s no need to worry about that.”

“Sir!”

Kunivela bowed his head.

He understood this already, but hearing Master actually talk about his superiority left him speechless.

“Now then, explain your findings to Number Two; Be quick about it.”

“Understood.”

For the members of “Corpus of the Abyss,” the fundamental aim of their research was to achieve great magical might. While he did not think the girl would understand, he told her anyway.

During this time, Master stored all the treasure into a magically-created pocket dimension.

“...And that is it.”

“Alright, thank you for your hard work. Now, for the next question: Tell me everything about all the members of your organization. Their abilities, their locations, points of note, and so on.”

So that was it. He had used this power to dominate the others, then made them tell

him everything before destroying them one by one.

In the past, they had all acted individually, but now that they were all informing each other of their status, it was as though everyone was joined by invisible strings. Rather than reap the harvest when he sensed his prey approach, all Master had to do was pull on that string and draw them over.

He did not want to talk, but Kunivela told him everything he knew. Thanks to the effects of the undead domination, he could not hide or lie about anything.

The girl would throw pointed questions his way from time to time. It was probably to ensure that it matched up with what they had learned from the already-destroyed members.

“Thank you.” Although Master had thanked Kunivela for coming clean, he probably meant none of it.

“Now then, this is the last question—”

The words “last question” made Kunivela panic. He had not yet shown his usefulness, and if this kept up, it would be for the worst.

“—Enough, Number One.”

The girl interrupted in a tone that suggested fatigue, or an empty vitality.

“That’s enough, Number One. After all, I’ve done a lot of research on my own, and I understand now... you know what I said about not deluding myself anymore two years ago?”

“...Is this about the Divine Maiden of the Sun? But this isn’t just for you, Number Two. I’ve told you several times, but this is also for my own personal interest. It’s not for you, but for me.”

The expression on the girl’s face was strange; it seemed lonely and happy at the same time. Kunivela could not understand it.

“I’ll ask, then. Do you know anything about how the country of Inveria was destroyed by all its people becoming Zombies?”

He searched his memory after hearing the word Inveria, but all he knew about it was that it was some faraway country.

“No, I know nothing.”

“Is that so... Then, do you know of anyway to revert a person who has been turned into a Zombie back to normal — that is to say, back into a living being? It doesn’t matter if it’s very unlikely.”

While he felt that this was a good time to demonstrate his worth, Kunivela knew nothing about the topic. If he had not been dominated, he would probably have tried to make something up to save his life, or lied that he was just about to begin research into that topic.

“No, I do not. But they say legendary beings like the Dragon Lords should know something about it.”

“That name comes up often. The vast being that floats in the sky, as well as the Brightness Dragon Lord.”

“In addition, there are—”

He listed the names of all the Dragon Lords he knew of. But he added that he was not sure where they were or if they actually existed.

Kunivela felt that this was his chance and desperately tried to sell himself.

“If you give me time, I will find the locations of these Dragon Lords immediately.”

“A good suggestion, but I will still be destroying you.”

The reply came back immediately.

“But, but why? Am I not useful to you?”

“Because allowing others to know about us would have many demerits for us. It is because you did not know about us that you could not find the right way to deal with us.”

“But it would be impossible to betray you if you used your ability to dominate everyone.”

"Indeed, that is so. But as you know, there is a limit to undead domination, both in upper limits and total numbers. There are far too many drawbacks for me to afford the luxury of dominating you, as long as there is no way to absolutely guarantee that you will never betray me."

"We would never betray—"

"I explained it to you just now, didn't I?"

Kunivela swallowed his words.

There was nothing he could show the undead being before him that could change his mind.

"Now then, let's put an end to this."

2

Suzuki Satoru and Keno rode their covered wagon onward.

This was not the covered wagon they had "bought" from Keno's homeland of Inveria, but something that they had purchased around a year ago. Incidentally, this was the fourth such carriage; the first had been destroyed, the second had been burned in an attack, and the third had been abandoned.

The two people on the driver's seat — Suzuki Satoru with reins in hand, and Keno beside him with a magical tome on her lap — chatted about nothing in particular as usual while they made their way over the quiet plains.

Keno's hair, which descended to her slender, porcelain neck, swayed in the wind.

While she had asked Suzuki Satoru to cut it for her, he felt that it would be better for her to wear a hood. That was because he was unsure if the smell of dirt and dust in the air would infuse itself into her hair.

However, he would not actually say that out loud.

Keno was at a difficult age now.

If Suzuki Satoru had brought it up, she would go “Hmph~” and puff up her cheeks. Keno’s mood improved when he did not treat her like a child, so Satoru too had tried not to talk like that.

She had been alone for 40 years, and the two of them had been together for five more. Her mindset should have grown more during the latter part of that. However, she did not seem to have grown at all.

He worked the reins, which slapped against the horse’s rump.

There was no meaning to that action. The horse pulling the wagon was the same Golem that had pulled their wagon back then. But it was all part of the act. The two of them had done a lot of acting during their journey.

It was true that both of them were undead and they had a Golem Horse. None of them needed to sleep and they could all see in the dark. However, they still set up tents at night to avoid suspicion. Of course, they did not need to sleep, so the two of them typically talked in their tents until daybreak.

While Keno’s actual age exceeded Suzuki Satoru’s, she did not have much life experience since she had never left the city. She was a ten year-old heiress who had never left her hometown. This meant that she rapidly ran out of things to talk about and could only fall back to her knowledge of what she had learned.

On the other hand, Suzuki Satoru’s stories were very well-received by Keno. Not his stories of the real world where Suzuki Satoru lived — a world shrouded in a thick layer of clouds — but tales of YGGDRASIL.

To a girl who lived in a world of swords and sorcery, Suzuki Satoru’s adventures in YGGDRASIL were what made her eyes glow in excitement.

At first, there were quite a few things which made Keno frown. They seemed too far-fetched and ridiculous for her. But Suzuki Satoru had proof. While it was not a complete record, Suzuki Satoru’s photo albums contained pictures of the things he spoke about.

Keno, who did not know what photos were, seemed to regard them as exquisite portraits. But after seeing a photo — of Satoru and herself — she accepted that they were faithful depictions of the landscape.

Things were simple after that.

They proved that the adventures which filled Keno with dread were events which Suzuki Satoru had experienced. In other words, the adventures of the great magic caster Suzuki Satoru were true.

The admiration in Keno's eyes soon turned into shining respect, which Suzuki Satoru saw. It greatly improved his mood and he began to speak effusively. Before long, Keno knew the adventures of Ainz Ooal Gown like the back of her hand.

That was how they had spent their five years.

And today, the same story ended as the wagon swayed.

"And so everyone from Ainz Ooal Gown gave rise to another legend. You're amazing, Satoru."

"Fufu, it's nothing that great, Keno. With members like that, accomplishing that much was child's play. Here's a photo of that time."

Suzuki Satoru let go of the reins and gave verbal orders to the Golem Horse.

He used his empty hands to take out his photo album and flipped through it, muttering, "Where is it?" as he did. He found a picture of them after they had defeated the Fire Giant Lord Surtr and showed it to her.

"Wow!" Keno exclaimed in delight. "You're amazing... I can't believe you managed to defeat such a mighty giant... Mm, no. It was possible because of everyone in Ainz Ooal Gown. After all, who else could defeat a Giant Lord who wielded such a powerful flaming staff?"

"Yes... that might be true."

After taking back and putting the picture away, he recalled the many times they had beaten Surtr.

It had not been terribly difficult because his elemental resistances were supremely monofocused, but Suzuki Satoru did not want to say so and shatter the girl's dreams, thus disappointing her. Therefore, Suzuki Satoru simply smiled.

“Precisely! You and your friends were amazing, Satoru!” His spirits raised, Suzuki Satoru went along with Keno’s excitement.

“Really now! I guess so! The way everyone managed to avoid death and hang on after he threw away his sword and took out Laevatein was very well done.”

“Yup! Everyone was amazing! They won because of you, Satoru!”

“You think so? Hahaha!”

Suzuki Satoru laughed, in a very good mood.

“Did you and your friends really repeat all those amazing adventures, Satoru?”

“Indeed we did. And then we’re going on a great adventure on ourselves too, aren’t we?” Keno smiled bitterly.

“Really? But it doesn’t feel like a fancy adventure or anything.”

“Doesn’t it all depend on how you look at it? It’s been five years since we set out from your country. Haven’t we been to many countries and seen many mysteries? Fighting isn’t everything, you know.”

Enjoying the unknown.

Heading out on a trip and using your own eyes to see the world — was that not the true adventure YGGDRASIL sought? Now, he could kind of understand how the World Searchers felt.

Of course, there was nothing wrong with fighting beside your friends and playing the game. But Suzuki Satoru was confident in saying that his journey with Keno was the journey the two of them ought to have gone on.

“I — suppose. That Seven-Scorched Plain and Clear Lake were both pretty amazing.”

“Personally, the Seven-Scorched Plain was kind of gross for me, but the Clear Lake was very beautiful. It looked just like glass.”

“Yup. It’s amazing!”

The two of them continued reminiscing about that beautiful sight as they continued onward.

"If only I could see those sights again."

"We can go again if we've got nothing on. After all, our lifespans are unlimited."

"That's true," Keno replied.

"And also... you've become stronger than before, Keno. Want to try taking on a powerful enemy?"

Travel and battle were inextricably linked. It was not a matter of security; when one went to less populated regions, monsters that regarded one as prey would show up, and there was the chance of meeting strong foes when visiting scenic spots. That said, Suzuki Satoru had only encountered one opponent that he would consider strong. However, there were countless foes who would have killed Keno instantly had she been alone.

Suzuki Satoru was in charge of violence while Keno would handle the brainwork, but it was still important for Keno to be tough enough to take a hit from a powerful being.

"Just, just count me out... ah! I know you're thinking about me, Satoru, and I'm glad! And you've also lent me several amazing items! But what do you call it? Ah, grinding, that doesn't seem to work, does it? I mean, I don't really like taking a stick and beating a dying Dragon with all its limbs chopped off over and over again... I'm not talking about your plan, but more like how you kept ignoring its pleas for mercy, er, yeah, that's kind of heart-wrenching — no, it's not like that. Of course I know you don't like that sort of thing either, and you're only doing it because of me. And I don't want to get the pretty clothes you lent me dirty. I'm just thinking that maybe there could be another way next time."

Keno managed to squeeze all those words out with unnecessary haste.

It would seem she did not like the incident where she was training on the Dragon. *Well, having a girl do that sort of thing was a little inhumane*, Suzuki Satoru regretted. *Maybe I should find an opponent she won't mind abusing next time*. Thieves and others who were unworthy of mercy should probably be left for a later date because they could speak. Maybe some creature who could not speak or an object might be better. Suzuki Satoru then began to consider various monsters. Personally speaking, giant insects

and the like seemed like good candidates.

"I've got it, Keno. Next time I'll plan it out better when we go grinding."

He smiled and gave her a thumbs up. Keno responded with an expression that was hard to describe in words. It was a precious look that he could only see once a year. No, when they had first set out, he felt like he had seen it more often than that, but he was not so sure about the events of five years ago.

"Umu. That said, I don't know how your karma value's changed. However, since mine is negative, I'm hoping that yours will become positive to compensate. That being the case, it would be best to slaughter opponents with negative karma values."

"Ah, eh? No, that, er... Satoru, let's talk about that later. Look, you can see the city already. It really does stand out."

"Ahhh, so it does."

Suzuki Satoru could see a city ahead of him. He had heard about it through rumors, but it was quite a large walled city. "Large" in this case did not refer to its scale, but in a literal sense; the physical buildings and city walls were very large. Of particular note was the massive rocks to either side of the gates. They were roughly 150 meters tall or so. The rocks that were placed on either side of it had become part of the city wall.

The city walls had not been built because they had been located next to those rocks. Rather, the Giants who lived nearby had delivered them from their homes as a sign of friendship. After that, thanks to the friendly relations with those giants, every part of the city — like say, the buildings, the urban layout, and so on — were sized so that the giants would not have to undergo discomfort, or at least that was what Suzuki Satoru had heard.

How many Giants had it taken to ship it over, and how had they done it?

As Suzuki Satoru considered the matter with growing interest, he indicated to the hooded Keno that she should change the rings she was wearing.

As a Vampire, Keno suffered a penalty to all actions under sunlight. However, she had managed to negate that by wearing an anti-sunlight ring. The indication was for her to change it to something else. Even wearing a hood would not negate the penalty and she would still feel tired, but things would be troublesome if she could not endure just

that tiny bit.

He had lent four rings to Keno: a “ring of reducing sunlight exposure penalties,” a “ring of proof against undead control and banishment” so even Suzuki Satoru could not dominate her, a “ring of proof against divination magic,” and a “ring of immunity to bindings and other movement impediments.” He would give her others depending on the circumstances.

This time around, she would be putting on the “ring of proof against undead control and banishment,” and the “ring of proof against divination magic,” both of which were very important when entering cities.

In contrast, Suzuki Satoru made no attempt to hide his bony visage. After all, one could say that he had been training to enter cities with his face exposed during his five years of travelling. Also, he had been told that it would be better to show his true face when trying to enter cities. If he was forthright and did not try to hide himself, it would be easier to bluff his way through.

He had tried using illusions to camouflage himself before, but after an unhappy accident he no longer relied on them.

“Speaking of which, Satoru.”

“Hm?”

“Why are we coming back this way?”

Keno’s homeland was only a little further beyond this place. Satoru had not brought her here during the past five years.

“Hm? We’ve been all over the world, but we haven’t come here, have we? Wouldn’t it be good to climb those mountains we can barely make out in the distance?”

“I see.”

It would seem that Keno did not quite believe that explanation, given her tone. Suzuki Satoru could tell given that they had spent five years travelling together. However, he had no intention of telling Keno the reason for coming to this city.

The Golem Horse-drawn wagon carried the two of them to the main gate without

slowing down. Perhaps they had good timing, but there was nobody there except Suzuki Satoru and company.

The gate guards were assembled, and there was danger in the air. Everyone had their spears ready. He glanced to the walls and saw the archers assembled there. Needless to say, they were all wary of Suzuki Satoru.

“Halt!”

A stern voice called out to them. It seemed to belong to some sort of guard captain. Suzuki Satoru nonchalantly ignored it and replied in a bright, cheerful tone.

“Yo, nice weather we’re having.”

Confusion immediately spread throughout the guards, but they soon resumed their stern demeanor.

“What are you doing here, undead!?”

“The undead? Where?”

Suzuki Satoru looked around, as though on purpose.

“What nonsense are you—”

“—Could it be that you’ve mistaken me for one of the undead!?”

He interrupted the soldiers’ cries and shouted back at them.

“I’m not undead! I’m Satoru the Oldbone!”

“Old... bone?”

The soldiers looked at each other and then they shook their heads. He could hear them asking each other, “Have you heard of them before?” “As if, this is the first time I’ve heard this.”

“Don’t you think it’s very rude to mistake one of the glorious Oldbones for an undead creature? It is a grave insult to our nation!”

The gate guards looked at each other again. The Captain — that would be his name for now — replied in a very confused tone. However, he showed no sign of lowering his weapon. Still, that was only to be expected.

“You mean, you’re not undead?”

“I told you, didn’t I? I’m Satoru, of the glorious Oldbones!”

“No, ah, my apologies. Forgive my ignorance, but I’ve never heard of the name Oldbone before.”

“What!? You don’t even know of the great and mighty Oldbones? What kind of hick town is this anyway...”

The proud gate guards naturally took offense to being dismissed as hicks. While they were unhappy with this, it would seem they had eased off greatly in their caution.

There were many races in this world. Humanoids aside, there were also many demihumans and heteromorphs with bizarre appearances. Discriminating against members of those races might incur the ire of their nations. If that led to a war, it might result in the extinction of one party. In fact, several countries had been destroyed that way.

For that reason, gate guards had been asked to respond appropriately to the situation. The more species that a nation made contact with, the more intensively that nation’s guards would be trained.

In other words, they would not act rashly if they thought he was not undead but part of the Oldbone race.

After that, taking advantage of their confusion and seizing control of the situation would be key.

“It seems I need to let you ignorant hicks know of the greatness of us Oldbones. Like I said before, I am Satoru, hailing from Greatokyo, the great capital of the Oldbones. I have come here... to find something of value, although I don’t think there’s anything great here which will catch my eye.”

“.....Are you a trader?”

“Indeed I am. That said, I won’t buy anything if nothing catches my eye.”

“We need to check your luggage first, but before that, we really need to, uh... what’s that... ah... check you out. You understand, right? If you do, then... please wait there. I’ll go get the priest.”

The Captain’s tone gradually segued into one giving in to Suzuki Satoru.

“I understand. While I was wondering exactly what kind of primitives you were to mistake the Oldbones for the undead, we are very magnanimous.”

“And that girl over there is?”

“She is my companion, and also an Oldbone.”

“Hah?”

The Captain looked at Keno in shock, and then began comparing her to Satoru. He could be heard muttering questions like, “He says she’s an Oldbone?” and, “They’re completely different, right?”

“Very similar, no?”

“...Ah, um.”

The Captain was looking down in what seemed to be embarrassment.

Soon, Suzuki Satoru could see a soldier bringing a priest over. He was a fat man who looked like just running a little bit would put him out of breath.

After he arrived, the priest wiped his sweat away with a handkerchief and panted heavily, like he was struggling for breath.

The Captain said, “Excuse me,” and went over to the priest.

“Priest-dono, thank you for taking the trouble to come all the way out here.”

“What are you saying, Captain-dono? This is our duty. That said, I hope you won’t rush me so much next time. I don’t want to be dragged before the throne of the gods before I arrive here.”

The priest's breaths were like sobs as he replied.

The two of them had done their best to quiet themselves, and they were some distance away, but Suzuki Satoru could still hear them.

"Still, aren't there horses at the temple?"

"What are you saying Captain-dono? Wouldn't you feel sorry for any horse I rode?"

"Priest-dono... it might be better for you to learn to ride."

"It'll hurt my butt and thighs, so I'll pass, if you don't mind!" the priest said as he ignored the Captain's reply of, "But you have healing magic," and stared at Suzuki Satoru. "Very well, I shall do what I was called here to do. Turn unde—"

"No, those people claim to be Oldbones. They don't seem to be undead."

"Hah? Oldbones?... But they look like undead to me."

"Are they? However, things will get really troublesome if they really aren't undead..."

"Hm — alright. After all, it would be bad if I chased away people who might donate to our temple, and who knows how the higher-ups will censure me. If I ended up becoming a village priest then — ahem!"

"No, that's not the problem, Priest-dono."

"No, that *is* the problem, Captain-dono. This place lies within the Marquis' domain. Even if he's given us some degree of autonomy, we will still suffer if we act on our own, without regard for the nation's interests. Moreover, the incident will blow up if we offend someone who happens to be a high-ranking member of another race. Captain-dono, I trust you don't want your name to go down in history as the fool who started a war that led to the destruction of the nation, do you? I, of course, will pass on that. In addition, should such a thing come to pass, it would also cause all sorts of trouble for everyone else too!"

"...So you do get it. Therefore, could I trouble you to check whether or not they actually are undead?"

"It's very troublesome, so can't you just let them go? Have some soldier keep an eye

on them while pretending to be an escort or something.”

The two of them exchanged looks, and in the end, the priest rounded his shoulders in defeat.

“Fine, fine, I get it.”

As the priest grumbled about having to cast a spell for free, he walked up to Suzuki Satoru and then greeted him with a cheery smile.

“Greetings, honored Oldbone guests. I am a servant of the temple in this city. While I believe your words, I need to cast a spell in order to allay the doubts of others. I pray you do not resist it.”

The fact that he had not even stated his name showed exactly how desperate he was to avoid trouble. One could say it was exactly as Suzuki Satoru had planned.

“I understand. Please proceed, priest-dono.”

“<Detect Undead> — I see. Indeed, he is not undead, Captain-dono, being that there was no reaction to it. Also — yeeart!”

The priest raised his hand. Suzuki felt a strange force pushing on him. It was probably some kind of undead-destroying ability. However, it was completely ineffective on Suzuki Satoru and Keno. While the difference in their levels was part of it, the main reason was thanks to their magic items.

“As I thought, there was no reaction. This man is not an undead creature.”

“Really?”

“I told you, didn’t I? I am Satoru of the Oldbones. Treating me as undead is quite frustrating.”

He saw the guards around him lower their spears. They still surrounded him, but there was no longer any tension in the air.

“This means I’ve discharged my duty, right? Ahh, where would you find such a calm and friendly undead being? I was already thinking that he couldn’t possibly be undead before coming here,” the priest said as he glanced at all the guards. “And yet you still

called me here. I can only think of this as you trying to abuse me!"

The priest ended in a joking tone. The Captain looked at his men and replied in a similarly light-hearted fashion.

"Well done on making the Priest-dono run down here! I've always felt that there was a problem with his size. Continue taking the chance to make him run like this in the future!"

The Captain and the priest had a good laugh. It was the kind of laugh that sounded like they were grinding their teeth, like they were actually thinking of something else.

The two of them stopped, as though they had both had enough of laughing. The priest turned his back on Suzuki Satoru and headed to the town, while the Captain stood before Suzuki Satoru once more.

"Forgive me, Satoru-dono, Oldbone merchant. Now then — please allow us to inspect your luggage."

"By all means. However, I have almost none, as I came to make purchases."

Suzuki Satoru and Keno dismounted, and in turn a group of people who looked slightly different from the gate guards but who were all business got onto the wagon. They were assessors, in charge of checking luggage and levying tolls.

90% of the wagon's contents was grain — though it made up 90% by volume, it was only a tenth of the wagon's loaded weight. Even if one went by volume, the tax on this quantity of grain would be very light.

Suzuki Satoru and Keno underwent a brief body search, to ensure they were not carrying contraband. Just then, the employees who were searching the wagon came back. One of them was holding a small chest.

"Could you open the lock on this treasure chest?"

"Certainly"

Suzuki Satoru opened it and the gleaming of gold spilled forth. The box contained 500 pieces of gold trade currency. There was also a leather bag inside with quite a number of gemstones. This was a large sum of money, but it was an unremarkable amount for

something in the possession of a trader from afar.

The employee rolled up his sleeve and reached his arm in to check the chest's interior.

“—There’s nothing inside. And there are no hidden compartments in the wagon. The only thing is that the horse is not a living creature.”

“It is a Golem Horse.”

“...Can the Oldbones really control such things?”

“Of course. They are Golem Horses who do not need to eat, drink, or excrete. They do not quail before frightening monsters. Does that not make them perfect for transportation?... The fact that you don’t have these is why you’re hicks.”

Suzuki Satoru went on to make digs at them, as though he wanted people to tell him to give it a rest. This too was part of the act, and he internally apologized to them.

After the employees heard this, they gathered around for a discussion. They were probably talking about how much to tax the Golem Horse, since there was no precedent for it. After a brief talk, they decided to tax it the same as any other horse and discuss the rest with the Marquis later.

After paying the toll for Suzuki Satoru, Keno, a horse, and the grain, they received a permit to enter the city.

The Captain addressed Suzuki Satoru as he took up the reins and prepared to urge his horse on.

“Er, yes. I have to say this. Trader of the Oldbones... I’ll get to it. It would be better not to reveal your face in this town.”

“And why would that be... Ahh, is it because you think people will mistake me for the undead? That they will confuse me with the—”

“Ahhh, I get it, I get it.”

The Captain waved off Suzuki Satoru as the latter was raising his voice, in an extremely annoyed way.

“...A case of mistaken identity would be very bad. That said... while it’s very natural for us to hate the undead, it seems your reaction is a little excessive, did something happen?”

“Ahhh, indeed it did. However, that was over 20 years ago. A great deal of undead once invaded this nation, and it was known as the Undead Disaster. That incident caused a great deal of damage, and while this city was not directly affected by it, we still have people who lost family and friends here. — Do you understand?”

“The Undead Disaster, you say?”

It seemed to be related to the incident in Keno’s country that had turned its people into Zombies.

That incident had not just taken place in Keno’s country. The Zombification had affected everything within 250 kilometers. The conclusion that Suzuki Satoru had drawn over years of investigation was that it had led to the downfalls of four nations.

However, this country was far away from there, and there was another country in between them. Also, the Zombies of that city were simply wandering around. Why had they overflowed to this country?

Perhaps it was too early to jump to conclusions.

“And that’s not all. If you head northwest from here and to the next country over, you’ll be able to see the same or more undead. It seems there were too many of them to deal with.”

It was in the opposite direction where Suzuki Satoru and Keno had come from, in the direction of Keno’s country.

“Hm—” Suzuki Satoru asked a roundabout question. “I feel there must be some reason why all those undead beings appeared. Was there some kind of great war? It’s common for corpses left on the battlefield to start moving.”

The Captain shook his head.

“I’m not sure about that. All I know is that the undead suddenly appeared. There are rumors saying that it was caused by some spell going out of control... although they’re just rumors. I hear the neighboring countries have deployed their troops along the

border to defend against undead attacks.”

Suzuki Satoru did not think as he replied. This country’s leadership was still fairly intelligent, in that they had not taken this opportunity to invade their neighbors who were holding off the undead for them. No, the undead were their common enemy, so it was likely that they would have sent their own forces to back them up.

“In any case, that’s why we’re so cautious of the undead. So I hope you won’t do anything to make others misunderstand you.”

“Very well... ah, my apologies,” Suzuki Satoru coughed lightly. “I understand what you mean. Then, I shall cover up my face with a mask... but could you do me a favor?”

“What is it?”

“If there is a high-end inn that you would recommend, could I trouble you to send a man over to help me run an errand? Tell them that a trader of the Oldbones will be coming over to lodge with them. That will save a lot of problems. After all, most inns don’t take suspicious guests in masks.”

The Captain’s face knotted briefly. He probably did not want to have gate guards serve as runners for a mere merchant.

“If you help me out, it’ll improve the opinion of us Oldbones about this city, you know.”

“...Ah, very well then. It can’t be helped. I’ll give it as an apology for mistaking you for one of the undead. Oi!” he shouted to a nearby guard. “You, go over to the Canopy Inn.”

Upon receiving his orders, the soldier ran out.

After hearing the Captain tell him how to go to the inn, Suzuki Satoru produced a leather pouch and handed a gold coin to the Captain.

“I am very grateful. Go buy some drinks for your boys.”

“I see. You Oldbones sure are different from the undead. Take care, little mi — I mean, Madame.”

“Thank you.”

Keno — who had been silent all this while — nodded to him, and the wagon passed through the city gates.

3

The inn was huge.

This did not refer to its architectural footprint, but the overall size of the entire building; each door was at least four meters tall. However, it still would not be able to accommodate large races like Giants, and so to put it bluntly, their attempts to appeal to everyone failed to win over anyone.

Suzuki Satoru pushed open the weighty doors.

Contrary to how they appeared, the doors swung open easily. He had not used much force — even a child should have been able to push them open.

This was probably an inn cum restaurant, given that there were people sitting around and drinking in the middle of the day. They looked surprised to see Suzuki Satoru's mask.

He ignored their reaction and then he noticed the bartender. "I see, no wonder the inn was built so large," Suzuki Satoru mused.

The bartender was a massive man standing over two and a half meters, and he had a massive horn protruding from his forehead which pointed to the sky.

He was massively muscled, and his well-developed pectorals bulged out his white uniform. He did not look like the owner so much as a bouncer, and truth to be told he might have been just that.

Before him, Suzuki Satoru was like a child again. He walked straight towards the man and got up onto one of the stools beside the bar with some effort.

"I'd like a room for two, for one night. Will that be a problem?"

"Not at all — and I have to apologize, little man, our chairs here aren't too suitable for smaller folk."

Is he mocking me, Suzuki Satoru thought. However, his face implied that he was not doing so, which meant that he was being sincere.

“It’s fine, don’t worry about it.”

“Given the size of your little buddy, I could recommend you a few other good inns, but those wouldn’t fit you too well, little man. There are also inns suitable for big guys for you... but they’re of a lower standard. If you don’t mind, I can tell you about them.”

“I have no intention of lowering the standards of my accommodations.”

While there were many ways to entertain oneself during a journey, living in luxury was essential for the pair, since they could not enjoy good food. Therefore, they always lodged in the highest-end inns whenever they went to a city.

“Is that so? Then, how about the room? Even the bed in a single room would be enough for the two of you, which would also be cheaper.”

“There’s no need for that. I am not short of money. Give me a double room.”

The innkeeper whistled.

“I wish I could do whatever I wanted, just like you. Go ahead and throw your money at me then. Let’s see...” The innkeeper bent down, and when he came up again he had a key in his hand. “Take this. Oh yes, may I ask how you two honored guests arrived here?”

“We took a covered wagon. The soldier who came by earlier is taking care of it. Our goods are only a few bags of grain.”

“Oh, then how about the beast pulling your wagon? Feed will be extra, and so is having a groom take care of it.”

“It is a Golem Horse. It doesn’t need care or feeding.”

“Huh!” The innkeeper suddenly exclaimed. “So there were things like that. I guess I’m not up to date on these things. Well done.”

Suzuki Satoru could sense that the patrons who had been quietly drinking at first were now all focused on him. Had the topic of a Golem caught their interest, or had they

unconsciously looked over in response to the innkeeper raising his voice?

They haven't looked away after a while, so it should be the former, Suzuki Satoru thought.

If it were the latter, they would have lost interest quickly. Since they had not looked away, it would seem they knew something about Golems.

Is it because there are Golems working in the city, or have all travellers heard of such things?

"Acquiring this Golem Horse cost me a pretty penny. Oh, how much are the room fees? Ah yes, could you omit the cost for meals? We're planning to head outside to sample the local delicacies."

The innkeeper was briefly suspicious, but then he accepted Suzuki Satoru's explanation immediately. Perhaps he had remembered the guards' description of Suzuki Satoru.

"Ah, so that's how it's going to be, little man. Er — yeah, that might be for the best. You might be able to hold it in, but I think your little buddy won't be able to take it."

"Won't be able to take it?"

"Well, our portions are enough to fill our bellies. A big helping's around two kilos. Can you finish that much?"

"Impossible."

The innkeeper laughed a loud "Wahaha," as he heard Suzuki Satoru's prompt reply. After that he stated the price, which was fairly low compared to all the others they had encountered during the course of their journey.

Now, whether that price was *fair* remained to be seen. After all, the prices of things varied from city to city, and that would also be affected by the room they were given. Matters became even more complicated once one considered that this was a major city on the Marquis' domain. However, top-end inns in national capitals typically had very few free rooms, and the expenses of staying in one for a night would be five to ten times as much as this place.

After asking why the price was so low, the answer he received was, "This is without

the cost of food."

It would seem this inn not only provided a large amount of food, but they were also very confident in the quality of their cuisine. Suzuki Satoru suddenly felt a pang of regret over his inability to eat. No, to be precise, he felt the same way every time he went to a new country, a new market, or a new plaza.

"Keno."

"Mm."

That one word was more than enough for Keno to understand Suzuki Satoru's intentions. She produced a pouch and handed over the amount that the innkeeper had asked for. Needless to say, it was just a deposit.

"Come again!"

The innkeeper handed over a massive key and then briefly told Suzuki Satoru about the room's location. After that, Suzuki Satoru and Keno climbed the stairs leading to their room on the second floor.

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Each individual step was very high, and Keno had a harder time climbing them than Suzuki Satoru. However, both of them were undead, and climbing a flight of stairs was not enough to tire them out. Their room was very spacious, and the first thing they noticed was that the ceiling was very high. Then, they noticed the two enormous — a size beyond king-size — beds that were planted smack in the middle of the room, and then they noticed the exceptionally large cabinet and benches.

Keno exclaimed in delight and threw herself onto the bed, and then — the look on her face defied description. She had probably expected to be bounced back up after jumping onto the bed, but there were no springs inside, and what she felt instead was a stiff sensation.

That said, the clean white sheets alone more than merited a passing grade.

"So, when will we be going to the market, Satoru?"

It had become a tradition for the two of them to visit the markets whenever they came to a new city. Not only did it fulfill the requirement of buying items necessary for their travels, it also allowed them to investigate the market.

“Well, about that... it’s fun to go strolling down the city streets, and we need to find a market and get a feel for the situation while the grains haven’t rotted. Still, I was hoping to learn more about the surrounding countries. After all, your knowledge is out of date, Keno.”

Upon hearing that, Keno narrowed her eyes slightly.

Me and my big mouth, Suzuki Satoru lamented as he saw her reaction. However, apologizing now would probably only make it worse, so it was probably better to pretend he had not noticed.

“—In that case wouldn’t a bard be better than a trader?”

“That’s true. A bard would be more appropriate.”

It would seem she was not particularly mad. After hearing Keno’s prompt answer, a weight lifted off Suzuki Satoru’s heart.

A travelling merchant or a bard or some other related tradesman would probably know the surroundings best. A mercenary might pay attention to the situation in the nearby country, but a trader would have heard rumors of what happened in more distant lands, while bards might have come from even further.

Between the two of them, traders were better for accurate information, but in terms of general topics bards came out on top.

Since biased information could result in huge losses, traders typically spent a lot of effort to ensure their news was reliable. In turn, bards sought stories from further afield, but they were not too concerned with accuracy. Being interesting was good enough. However, there were cases where some stories which seemed fake — interesting tidbits from distant lands — had actually happened.

In short, since Suzuki Satoru and Keno wanted to know more things, it was obvious that they would pick a bard.

Even if the news they gained was fake or just rumors, it would simply be a matter of

sighing in regret and going, “Ahhh, what a shame, it looks like I came all this way for nothing. Where shall I go next?” That was because they were undead — being possessed of infinite lifespans, they could afford to be that cavalier.

One could also say that they could savor the joy of the situation because they were undead.

—The joy of fruitless effort.

In addition, there was another reason for choosing a bard.

Bards considered storytelling to be a job. They would eagerly do so if paid.

On the other hand, traders were the sort of people whose information concerned their interests. Sometimes, it would be hard to get anything out of them, and they might not share what they knew honestly with Suzuki Satoru and Keno, being that they were strangers. If they tried for an introduction through a trader’s guild, one problem was that there were as many guilds as there were trade goods, and another was that members of the guild were typically curt to outsiders, citing reasons such as secrecy agreements and guild rules and the like. It typically ended up being very troublesome.

While bards had their guilds too, their management was not nearly as strict as those of traders’ guilds. Of course, some of them had strict rules, but experienced wanderers from faraway lands — in other words, higher-level bards — typically had an easier time in the guilds. However, Suzuki Satoru and Keno were not concerned with such details.

“We’ll hire a bard, then. Besides, we got a whole bunch of treasure from that previous lot, enough for several lifetimes of spending, so we’ll just be more generous with the payouts.”

Suzuki Satoru smirked to himself and it seemed Keno had not seen it. However, she wrinkled her brow and smiled bitterly for some other reason.

Suzuki Satoru sensed that there was some other meaning behind her expression, and decided to let her give him a score for that undead joke just now.

“About thirty-ish points?”

“Really... Are you sure you aren’t low-balling it?”

"I thought it was appropriate. It wasn't particularly funny or memorable."

"Ehhh..."

While he had not expected it to be a gut-buster of a joke, it was still disappointing to get such a low score. If this were a performance assessment or some kind of department goal, Suzuki Satoru would have probably started bargaining with his boss.

"Alright, let's go change our mood and find a bard. We'll go ask the innkeep about it first."



After paying the introduction fee to the innkeeper, the man brought over the bard that he had recommended in short order. Said bard was dressed in clothing that was just as fancy as this inn, and he was a member of the Four-Eyes humanoid race that hailed from a land somewhat distant from this one. A brief conversation with him revealed that he was quite a well-travelled bard — in other words, a fairly high-level one. That said, his level was nowhere near Suzuki Satoru's.

Of course, he had only encountered one being of comparable power to himself during his travels.

That would be the entity who resided upon the peak that men called the highest on the continent, a mighty foe who commanded the great power known as Wild Magic — the Brightness Dragon Lord, whose confrontation with Suzuki Satoru had ended in a draw.

Suzuki Satoru and Keno listened to the bard's tales.

While they had no idea why it was so, foreign spoken languages in this world were automatically translated into a recognizable form. Specific nouns retained their original pronunciation, but other meaningful vocabulary was translated. The question of who had done this and how they had done it was a riddle that remained unsolved. The logic behind the translation of song lyrics was murkier; an unskilled singer's words would sound like meaningless, broken nonsense. The performer's skill was not the only criteria either; the audience also needed a certain degree of culture and understanding. According to Keno, being able to accurately understand a song was a mark of social status in the upper crust, and there were actually specialized classes

for such things.

In any case, a philistine like Suzuki Satoru who not only had no taste but was uncultured to boot would only be able to think “What the hell is this guy singing?” no matter how skilled the singer was. Of course, he would be able to understand the words if they were not automatically translated; which is to say, if someone sang them in Japanese. However, in all his years of running around outdoors, he had never heard anyone speaking Japanese.

However, concluding that nobody here had ever used the languages of Suzuki Satoru’s world would be jumping to conclusions.

Fragments of them had been passed down through history, and Suzuki Satoru had also personally seen items that proved they existed.

Being that Suzuki Satoru’s mind was focused on such matters, the bard’s song went in one ear and out the other, but it was a different matter for Keno, who had received a royal education. She was lost in the beautiful music, and so Suzuki Satoru also pretended that he was listening to the song.

While he had no idea what the bard was singing, he clapped along with Keno at the end of each song. Though he found it incredibly boring, it was basic etiquette for a salaryman to keep it from showing on his face.

After several songs, it was finally time for the conversation segment that Suzuki Satoru had been looking forward to for so long.

Suzuki Satoru wasted no time and began asking him about rumors from the surrounding countries and what he had seen on the way here.

After about three hours, Suzuki Satoru felt that he had learned enough from the bard, and so he briefly left his place. When he returned, he placed a leather pouch on the table.

“Good heavens! Is all this money for me?”

The bard made no attempt to hide his surprise as he took the gold coins out of the pouch.

“Did you get the amount wrong?” In response to the bard’s question, Suzuki Satoru’s

attitude shifted to one of forthright generosity.

“Personally, I think it’s not enough for that wonderful voice of yours...”

Keno nodded and made noises of approval. If Suzuki Satoru had only paid him a paltry sum, she would probably have taken out her own purse to reward him — Suzuki Satoru had long since discerned her desire to reward him.

The contents of Suzuki Satoru’s own wallet went without saying, but Keno was also loaded. They had split the funds from the various members of “Corpus of the Abyss,” evenly between them. Keno had originally refused, but since they were travelling together, it meant that they were equal partners.

Still, Suzuki Satoru was in charge of the stolen cash for the most part, while he had given the gemstones and the like to Keno. There was a certain reason for this arrangement, and Keno did not seem unhappy with it.

“You, you’re too kind, I didn’t think my performance would be that well received. Thank you!”

The bard was grinning so widely that he could not shut his mouth.

While the amount he had paid the bard just now was more than the usual rate given the circumstances, it probably would not arouse suspicion if he said it was because he appreciated the skills of this bard

In exchange for Suzuki Satoru’s appreciation, the other party had developed great goodwill for him. This was an example of how an appropriate gift of money could endear one to others, a lesson that they had learned during their journey.

Naturally, ten gold coins was pocket change to Suzuki Satoru. If he were of a mind to do so, even paying several hundred times that amount would not even begin to raise a wrinkle on his brow. However, that was not how things were done. Overpaying, especially far above market price, tended to draw the attention of wicked and calculative people and all the trouble they brought in their wake.

“She thought highly of your singing, while I was impressed by your knowledge. We will be staying here for the next few days. During this time, I hope you will continue gathering information; if it pleases me, I will continue paying you.”

The bard's eyes lit up as he heard this.

Suzuki Satoru felt that it would be better to save the energy of hunting down various people to learn about the situation and instead hand that task to the bard. In the case of merchants, bards would be less likely to arouse their suspicion than they would, and the bard would also be a better judge of whether or not their information was reliable.

In other words, Suzuki Satoru had paid that large sum just now in order to get the bard on his side and ensure that he threw himself wholeheartedly into his task of gathering information.

"I understand. Then I shall take my leave for today."

"Very well. Ah, yes, given that your size is similar to ours, may I ask where you are lodging?"

"I see! Well, it's true that most of the guests this city entertains tend to be on the large side. I reside in an inn operated by the guild."

"Then it seems we won't be able to go there. I understand. In that case, can we invite you here again in three days' time?"

"Certainly! Leave it to me!"

The bard left the inn in a cheerful mood. People with deep pockets lightened his footsteps considerably.

After closing the room door, Keno looked excitedly at Suzuki Satoru.

"Look how confident he was! He was really good!"

"Yes, he was."

It was most likely correct since Keno had said so.

...I'm not sure if it's because I became undead, but I don't feel moved by works of art.

The similarly-undead Keno had been swayed by the song however, so that was probably not the reason. Still, Suzuki Satoru could not help thinking along those lines.

Keno continued talking without having noticed what Suzuki Satoru was thinking. Perhaps the normal Keno might have sensed what was on her companion's mind, but now she was too excited to care about such things.

"While I look forward to three days later — I don't think he'll reach that standard just now if he writes a new song."

"Hmm, I guess."

He might have been voicing agreement, but Suzuki Satoru did not understand those songs at all. Keno narrowed her eyes and looked at him.

"Liar."

"Hrg!"

"Forget it, I'll let you off this time. So, will we be strolling through streets afterwards?"

"That was the original plan, but—" Suzuki Satoru looked out the window, which was glazed with thick glass that did not let much light through. "The sun's already gone down. We spent quite a while listening to him."

"I'm sorry. It's all because I—"

"Nonono! Don't get me wrong, Keno, I'm not complaining about you. Being able to lose yourself in such wonderful music is a pleasure one rarely gets to enjoy. All I was saying was that it would be better if we could keep better track of time. And besides, even if it's late, it just means you can't go out."

Keno puffed up her cheeks and pouted.

"Isn't that because I'm not grown up?!... I've got it, what about lying that I'm from a race that's already of age?"

It was not impossible in theory. After all, much like the large races who frequented this inn, there were also small races. While it was impossible to tell that Keno was a child based on her height, it would be impossible to successfully bluff with her delicate, petite features. Surely her plan would cause a lot of trouble. The gate guards probably would not pursue the matter due to feeling guilty about confusing the Oldbones with the undead, but if they did not show them the appropriate appreciation to them, they

would probably get suspicious again.

Also, one could tell if someone was of age by looking at their faces, even if they were small. However, it was usually only those races who were similar to each other that could tell the difference by their looks. For instance, a demihuman's smile might be taken as intimidation by a humanoid.

In any case, if they insisted that Keno was an adult, the demihumans might not be able to tell, but most of the humanoids probably would not buy it.

"There's a lot of humanoids in this city, so it won't work."

"Then what about wearing a mask?"

"How suspicious do you want to make them, anyway?"

"That's true..."

Wearing a mask out on the street would invite suspicious looks from passers-by, unless they were conducting some kind of religious festival. In fact, Suzuki Satoru's visage had already drawn many eyes, and if not for that one time where he had tried and failed to use illusions to conceal his features, he would not have wanted to go around exposing his face either.

"We can try it the next time we go to a place with few or no humanoids. I guess it counts as an experiment in seeing if people buy that excuse."

Keno looked like she had just blossomed.

"But not this time."

Keno's face tensed up again.

"Uuu... ah, Satoru..."

"I'm not falling for that. Besides, how would people look at me if I brought a kid around with me on the main road at night?"

The fact was, Suzuki Satoru's words would not be completely accurate if he were walking around in the pauper's district, where stray children could be seen everywhere.

Going around there in beat-up clothes would earn a glance at most.

But given that Keno was dressed in clean clothes, it would draw a lot of attention. Even if the security on the main streets was good, it would be a different matter entirely at night.

In addition, it would also be very problematic if Keno was in rags. If some child in tatters was walking around with a normally dressed adult, the latter would probably be taken for some degenerate pervert who had bought himself a child prostitute.

Naturally, Suzuki Satoru did not want to be thought of as such a person. Definitely not!

But in that case, how could he let Keno walk around naturally on the night streets?

The answer was that Suzuki Satoru and Keno would both have to dress shabbily.

That way, the people in the paupers' district probably would not mind them.

However, they had arranged to meet someone tonight, so that route was out too. Therefore, he could not go out with Keno tonight.

Still, given the circumstances, all Suzuki Satoru and Keno needed to do was to move separately.

As long as she dressed up in rags, Keno could walk down the streets at night without drawing attention. And while Keno was small of frame, she was still a Vampire. Her physical attributes far exceeded those of an average adult. Combined with the improvement in her magical abilities over the past five years, she ought to be able to handle anything that came up. On top of that, she had the magic items Suzuki Satoru had lent her, so she would still be able to flee even if Keno came up against someone stronger than her.

However, neither of them wanted to go out and be a magnet for trouble.

The undead were the enemies of the living; if a problem came up, nobody would listen to them.

“But...”

“I understand how you feel and I know you must be unhappy about this. But I must

still insist that you stay here tonight until the sun comes up again.”

Suzuki Satoru knew what Keno was thinking. Boring nights were hard to pass for the undead, who did not need to sleep or rest. In addition, the city at night looked quite interesting; one could see many scenes that were dramatically different from the daytime. While it was sometimes more dangerous, that just made it more exciting — especially when said dangers were utterly inconsequential to the two of them, and experiencing those thrills was still very fun.

“Keno, haven’t I been telling you this all this time? Whenever we first come to a town, we have to stay put at night before we figure out the situation.”

Besides, Keno might have enough fighting power to defend herself, but an encounter with a hero- level enemy was still very dangerous.

All this time, he had always made her stay put until he was sure that there was nothing in the city that she could not handle.

“Then you should stay and talk to me, Satoru.”

In the past five years, they had passed the nights when the sun was absent from the sky by talking.

Not needing to rest meant that they had more time together — in terms of human relationships, it was as though they had travelled with each other for ten-odd years.

That was also why he had adopted such a plan.

Perhaps on normal days he might have given in and acceded to her, but today, Suzuki Satoru stood firm and shook his head.

“That’s a good idea too, but I’ll be doing what I always do, gathering information from the streets at night.”

Keno looked at him with a baffled expression on her face.

“Huh? Don’t you usually learn about the situation in the day?”

“Yes, normally I would, but I’m very bored today.”

“You jerk!”

“That’s why I need you to stay at home and mind the house, Little Miss Keno. Do you understand?”

“...Fine, I get it. I’ll go read some of the research notes we swiped. If I have to do any experiments, you *have* to help me, okay?”

“But of course.”

The research notes they had recovered from the members of “Corpus of the Abyss” were all along the lines of enhancing their skills to dominate more powerful undead, learning how to cast spells of higher tiers, enhancing the attributes of the undead and so on. Therefore, Keno had thrown herself into the role of backing up Suzuki Satoru, in the hope that completing one of those topics might end up strengthening Suzuki Satoru.

Sadly, none of their attempts had succeeded.

However, that was in Suzuki Satoru’s case.

Keno herself had benefited from them. It seemed like she had gotten a little stronger. In fact, she — who originally lacked the ability to dominate the undead — now possessed such an ability. From the perspective of YGGDRASIL’s racial and job class systems, that should have been impossible.

In that case, why had it not worked on Suzuki Satoru?

There were two possibilities.

One was that Suzuki Satoru could no longer learn new abilities — in other words, he was complete.

The other was that more in-depth research was required to strengthen someone at Suzuki Satoru’s level.

In any case, this research could not be done by Suzuki Satoru himself, and so Keno found enjoyment in diving headlong into that work.

Suzuki Satoru left Keno with a “Do your best” — it seemed to make her very unhappy

— and left their room.

4

Along the way, Suzuki Satoru — who had no choice but to hide his face with an illusion and change his clothes — opened the indicated door leading to a store, and he was mildly surprised.

This was a bar.

However, this did not look like the restaurant at night from the inn, and neither did it look like a hostess bar, but rather a place where customers could sample fine wines in peace — in other words, a high-class establishment.

It was an extremely classy place, and the atmosphere was something else entirely.

I see. Suzuki Satoru understood why they had to meet here.

He had never entered such a place during their journey. As one of the undead who could not eat or drink, Suzuki Satoru would naturally not need to go there, to say nothing of bringing along Keno, who looked like a child. Even in his previous world, he had only been to places like these twice, in order to entertain clients.

In other words, Suzuki Satoru had no idea how to behave here. However, the show had to go on. It would be bad if he embarrassed himself here. Just as Suzuki Satoru was at a loss, an attendant in a stylish outfit walked up to him.

“Welcome.”

The attendant bowed.

Before the man had approached him, Suzuki Satoru sensed that he had been sizing up his outfit. If he had not made the grade for entering the bar, he would probably have been politely asked to leave. In other words, he had made it through the door.

As a precaution, he had changed his clothes after hearing about the atmosphere inside this place. It would seem that had been the right thing to do.

Still, he should not mention that he had changed in the middle of the street under the

cover of <Perfect Unknowable>.

He looked inside the darkened bar — doing so was no problem for Suzuki Satoru, who was undead — and saw a man sitting on a sofa waving to him.

He was a man with a keen gaze, and his clothes clearly showed off his muscular body. He had a crystalline horn on his head. He was one of the humanoids known as the Sharp Horns.

Suzuki Satoru pretended that he had not spotted the man right away and continued looking around for a while before walking over.

He sat on the sofa opposite the man.

“Sorry for the wait.”

He had chosen to adopt a haughty attitude as a show of strength, the man did not seem to disapprove, but that was only to be expected. The employer — or rather, money — was boss; that much was the same no matter which world one was in.

“No, no, you were on time. I was simply too early.”

There were no cups on the table in front of the man, but it was clear that he had had a few drinks already, given the scent of alcohol hanging around him. The man had come early because this was such a high-end establishment and Suzuki Satoru was footing the bill. Of course, that was not all.

He was the leader of a skilled band of mercenary pathfinders. There had to be some other reason for choosing this place besides drinking.

These pathfinders were not like mercenary companies who numbered in the dozens or hundreds. For starters, there were less than ten of them, all elite, in their group. They took work without being bound by national loyalties. The missions they accepted involved wars between nations, investigating ruins said to be monster lairs, clearing out monsters, and various other tasks related to violence. If one was being nice, they could be called elite mercenaries. If not, they were a band of thugs.

Over a month ago, in a nearby city, Suzuki Satoru had hired them to carry out an investigation. He had come here today to learn the results of their work.

“Tell me, then.”

“Oi oi. I’ve been thinking about this for a while, but don’t you drink? I’ll feel bad if I drink alone, you know. Drinking helps simplify negotiations too.”

The man seemed to be using some kind of proverb, but Suzuki Satoru had never heard of it before. Of course, Suzuki Satoru knew that he was lacking in knowledge, so that might just have been a normal way of speaking. The man beckoned and a waiter quietly walked over.

“Give this old — ah, my apologies. Give my generous employer something to drink.”

“No need for that,” Suzuki Satoru refused coldly.

It was an act, just like before. In order to avoid having to keep refusing various offers, it was easier for him to act like this. From an adult’s perspective, if one kept refusing invitations to go out drinking, then eventually people would stop inviting you out.

“Ah, don’t mind me, just go ahead and drink.”

“Like I was saying just now...” The man’s words trailed off as he scratched his head.
“Ahhh, in that case, I’ll have a Clare.”

“Very well. Which year?”

“The eighth. Give it to me straight.”

“Certainly.”

Suzuki Satoru watched the waiter leave, and the man lowered his voice to speak.

“Now then — I’ll report our findings. The city we were told to investigate was taken over by Zombies. There’s no telling if there’s anyone living there.”

“Is that so?”

That was the outcome he had expected, and so Suzuki Satoru’s voice was calm. Perhaps the man was unhappy with that, because he changed his tone. However, he might have faked it. He was the sort of person who would not let his true feelings show even when drunk. Therefore, he was probably trying to emphasize how he felt.

"This is the third Zombie-infested city you've had us check, you know?... Don't you think it's about time you told us why? Why won't you let us go into the cities and investigate in detail? What do you want?"

While there was no need to answer that question, it would be bad if they had decided to barge in of their own accord. It would be best if he could answer in a way that did not reveal his intentions and removed their interest in the matter.

"Then I will answer your question with a question. I laid down the ironclad rule that 'You are not to enter the city.' Did you do so?"

"No."

"And why should I believe you?"

"We obey the instructions given to us by our employer. I guarantee it. After all, you're paying us so much."

He could not place any trust in that. The amount that Suzuki Satoru had agreed to pay out would look like peanuts if they had entered the city and plundered its treasures.

It was not yet time to learn the truth with mind control spells. Those were not a good choice; there would be trouble once the spell ended. He could seize him and use <Alter Memory> on him, but he was not confident in his ability to adjust memories with magic.

Getting good at these alterations would take a very long time, and his practice would involve turning a person into a vegetable. Given that he did not possess a proper base of operations, it was an unrealistic course of action.

Should he silence him or place his trust in him?

Suzuki Satoru wanted to silence him.

If they killed the Zombies and looted the city's treasures, it might pose a threat to Keno's country. This was especially true for private groups, whose actions were very hard to control.

It would seem the countries around Inveria had not sent out their armies to quell these cities.

However, these countries should have known about their neighbors' citizens all becoming Zombies. Some of those countries might have had the same thing happen to their people. Whether or not those countries had chosen to take military action or were preparing to do so remained to be seen.

Unfortunately, there was no way to verify this. A traveller like Suzuki Satoru would not be able to learn such state secrets no matter how much he paid. Still, he could think of a few reasons why the surrounding countries had not taken action yet.

Since the undead were enemies of all living beings, there was no direct benefit to eliminating them.

Even if they exterminated the Zombies and liberated a city, all they would gain was land without a workforce. Such land would be useless to them.

Perhaps it might be useful if they had excess mouths and ample manpower. But if they did not have that much population, then taking and holding unnecessary territory would only become a burden, since one needed bigger garrison forces as one's territory grew.

But if they left the undead alone, it might lead to the appearance of more powerful undead, so they would have to send their armies in eventually. However, negotiations would be needed in order not to agitate their neighbors when moving their forces, and then the nobles would push the responsibility for taking part in exterminations and so on to each other. Such matters would take a very long time.

And another thing was that as long as the cause for the situation was unknown, sending their troops in might lead to them turning into undead. Anyone with a brain could tell that.

Therefore, these masterless men who were driven by the desires were the more threatening opposition here.

Thus, he would need to disabuse them of that notion with a preventative measure, even if it meant lying to them.

"I see... that's good," Suzuki Satoru said as he deliberately lowered his voice. "I say, why do you think the people in the city turned undead?"

"You mean it wasn't because a monster showed up? You know, like a Soul Eater? I

heard that a lot of people died when that monster showed up in a certain country.”

Well yes, a lot of people would die if it walked around on the street with its skill active, Suzuki Satoru smiled bitterly in his heart. Granted, such undead beings were nothing special to him, but it would seem that they were very powerful in this world.

I remember there was a magic warrior riding a Soul Eater among the members of Corpus of the Abyss, but he was incredibly weak. Oh well...

“I don’t think so. We believe that there might be some kind of plague or curse at work here.” The man’s expression did not change upon hearing “we.” Suzuki Satoru ignored him and continued speaking. “It’s probably not poison. If there were a toxic cloud that could cover an entire city — of course, a cloud that turned creatures undead would be something else — but I’ve never heard of anything like that before.”

“So it can’t be a plague, then?”

“No, it’s more likely than a poison. After all, there are plagues which are unique to the undead. Perhaps this Zombie plague is something like that — highly infectious, spread by an airborne vector, and which can’t be treated by <Cure Disease>… A cursed disease.”

“Ah, ah — I see. Like Demon Fever, then. That’s why you didn’t want us to go in.”

It would seem he had taken the bait.

“I’m glad you understand. Normally, the infectious organisms should have died after so long, but it seems things are not normally. This special disease is different from the others and might be lurking in the bodies of the Zombies. Also, they might not be ordinary Zombies, but a new, infectious strain of Zombies.”

The man listened in silence, and Suzuki Satoru continued spinning his tale.

“While we don’t know the cause for it, it’s possible that one of you might have gotten infected too. It would be bad enough if you had turned into Zombies on the spot over there, but the worst case scenario is if it has a fixed incubation period. That would be troublesome. The infection might spread to this city and the surrounding villages.”

“Oi oi oi oi, boss. You should have told us about this danger beforehand, right?”

"And if I told you, who would have taken the job? Also, a death would have proven whether or not the city was safe. In any case, I'm not going to lose a moment of sleep if you end up dying because you couldn't follow instructions."

The man's gaze grew keen.

"So we're canaries, then..."

Suzuki Satoru smiled coldly, but did not reply.

"Then let me ask you again. Did you go in?"

"We didn't. I'm a man of my word... and I swear that I'll continue keeping my word in future."

The man's reply came instantly. After seeing his lack of hesitation of unease, Suzuki Satoru was certain that he was not lying.

"Well, what a shame — ah, I meant that you missed out on a chance to make a big sum — that is, the chance to gather an entire city's wealth."

The man furrowed his brows, as though on purpose.

"You pay well — but you're a terrible boss."

"Am I? If I really were a terribly boss, wouldn't I have urged you to enter the city? I'd have baited you with the lure of some rare item, no?"

The man appeared to have accepted that reasoning.

Just then, the waiter brought the wine over.

The man took a mouthful of it and then loudly exhaled a breath of alcohol-laden air.

"Well, thanks for the job. We'll take the payment as arranged, then."

Suzuki Satoru dumped a small pouch on the table. Then, he placed a large bag on the table, which clinked.

The man opened the smaller pouch, checked that there were four large gemstones

inside, and then closed it back up.

Since gold coins were too heavy, big transactions were typically made with gemstones and the like. Some countries used gemstones to make a type of extremely high-value currency called gem coins, or they made coins of mithril or adamantite, or “gold plaques” which had value beyond their weight, but this country did not use those.

“And... this is?”

The man had already opened up the bag and checked the gold coins inside. It was a large sum.

“The two bags together are the payment for the job. Take it.”

“Then you could have just used gems for both bags. It’s hard to carry this stuff home when you’re drunk.”

“Sorry about that, but please make do. This money isn’t quite enough for a gemstone.” Suzuki Satoru then muttered to himself, “Finances are pretty tight on my end too...”

Perhaps there was no point in such a fabrication, but it was worth trying. It would be fine as long as it could delay the man just a little.

“Then we’ll go to the appraiser’s together. The gems’ value—”

“—Ah, you don’t need to do that. Don’t be mistaken, but I trust you, you know? After all, it’s the third time you’ve hired us, and you’ve never once welched on the payment or tried to haggle the price too much. If I doubted you even then, it’d be pretty shameless of me.”

“No, it doesn’t matter even if you don’t believe me. We need to make sure there are no problems between us in order to avoid trouble.”

After Suzuki Satoru said so, the man exploded into laughter.

He laughed for a while, and then the man addressed Satoru, the afterglow of his mirth still on his face.

“You’re the one who doesn’t trust us, right? Well, it can’t be helped. Haha! Then let me come clean. I didn’t want to go with you earlier because this is a classy place and I

don't get the chance to come here often, so I wanted you to buy me a few more drinks."

I see... in other words, he wanted me to foot the bill. Well, that's fine...

"Well, that's it, then. I'll be heading back first."

Suzuki Satoru rose from his seat. The man raised his glass and watched him leave.

"Please continue taking care of us."

But will there be a next time? With that thought in mind, Suzuki Satoru smiled in a very meaningful way.

Employing the same pathfinders might arouse suspicion, so he was no longer willing to hire this man's team again. That was why he had paid him in gold.

Paying in gems would have been simple enough, but he had not done this because he wanted to take the gold that he had stolen from "Corpus of the Abyss" to him.

He remembered that certain divination spells could determine the location of marked items. The higher the tier of the spell, the more accurately they could track that position. However, he could not place such a mark after entering this world, unless they were distinctly different from other mass-produced items.

For instance, if he wanted to trace an ingot, it would need to be clearly distinct from other ingots — so little things like leaving an obvious scratch or some other mark on it would be important.

However, if the spell used was not of such a high tier, then once it was placed in a sealed container or some other place — like his inventory, for instance — it would be unfindable. Even high-tier spells would not be able to detect it through the appropriate magical defenses.

That said, after considering the danger of retaining anything which carried even the faint possibility of allowing others to track his position, Suzuki Satoru had decided to distribute these coins all over. He had kept this a secret from Keno.

Naturally, while he had dominated the members of "Corpus of the Abyss," he had asked them several times if items could be used as trackers. However, none of them had heard of anyone doing such a thing. That said, if even Suzuki Satoru could think of a

trap like that, who was to say that the undead members of “Corpus of the Abyss” could not do the same?

What I can do, others can do too... who knows, there might be a being out there who can control me with undead domination.

Both he and Keno were equipped with gear that improved their resistance to undead domination, but that was by no means a guarantee of protection. Even Suzuki Satoru, who was a supremely specialized necromancer, could not claim that. Moreover, Suzuki Satoru’s knowledge was rooted in YGGDRASIL.

It was true that most of his YGGDRASIL knowledge had been proven correct over the last five years, which had also been a great help to Suzuki Satoru. But it was also true that certain things — like how *<Wish Upon A Star>* functioned — had been changed. In that case, it might be possible that there was a way out there to dominate a level 100 undead being.

Carelessness was the province of fools.

Suzuki Satoru would not be bothered even if “Corpus of the Abyss” captured that man for questioning.

That man did not know Suzuki Satoru’s true face and most of the things he had told him were lies. Anything they could learn from him would only end up protecting Suzuki Satoru instead.

Even learning what Suzuki Satoru had employed him for would not be a problem. If the members of “Corpus of the Abyss” tried to use that in their schemes, it would play into Suzuki Satoru’s hands instead. After all, he might end up learning more from them when he attacked them as a result of this.

...But nothing's happened to them until now. I paid them twice already... ah well, I won't lose anything even if my efforts were in vain. But the situation I'm in now... is it money-laundering?

As he thought absentmindedly about all this, Suzuki Satoru paid the barkeep three times the value of what the man had drunk so far.

There was no telling how much more he would drink, but since he had already given him so much, he could pay for the rest out of his own pocket if it still was not enough.

With that thought in mind, Suzuki Satoru left the bar.

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The man — Bez Ku Broven (Bez, son of Broven, of the Ku tribe) had drunk quite a lot, and he could feel the alcohol circulating inside him. Still, it was not enough to make him unsteady on his feet. It was still alright if it only slowed this thinking. Being a mercenary who had made his fair share of enemies, Bez would not show anyone any weaknesses.

While there were times when he had actually gotten drunk to bait the enemy out, he had friends with him then. And today, there were no friends with him.

While I wanted to have them follow the client... actually doing that would be stupid.

His mercenary's instinct told him that doing so would be treading on a Dragon's tail.

Bez waved the waiter over.

“Bill please.”

He had a pouch in an inside pocket and bag that was so full that it was hard to walk around with it. Compared to what his client had given him, his expenses here were nothing much.

“No, there’s no need for that.”

As he heard what the waiter said after walking over, Bez laughed merrily.

“Oh, sorry about that.”

He had just been kidding back then, but it would seem his client was not in any financial trouble, judging from the way he could pay for Bez without even buying himself a drink.

While he would very much like to have toasted the client in thanks, the glass before him was empty and he was not in the mood to ask for more.

Then let’s go, he thought. It was only when he got to his feet that he realised the waiter had not yet moved away from in front of him.

For some reason, a dangerous look began creeping into his eyes just as the waiter began speaking.

“Dear customer. May I know who that guest just now was?”

“Hm?”

Bez’s brows knotted in displeasure. To think he was actually asking for personal information about a customer — how the hell was this place training its people?

Perhaps he would not have minded the question if this was some hole-in-the-wall city tavern. But this place was different. There ought to have been a respect for their customer’s privacy which matched the amounts changing hands here. There must be a guild of some strength backing this place up, probably. One needed a certain degree of power to chase away the riffraff. Perhaps they might have ties to illegal organizations, in order to easily deal with rude customers.

“I’m terribly sorry. That customer was dressed in exquisite clothing, so I was wondering what manner of person he must be. I was very interested in it.”

The waiter had said all that despite Bez not saying anything. In other words they were saying, “We’ll give you information too, so please reveal something to us.”

“Ah, his clothes, ah—”

“The tailoring, the needlework, the material, it’s all excellent. He would probably be one of the best-dressed customers we’ve had here so far — the very best, in fact. In truth, I have no idea what those clothes are even made of.”

If even the employees of this establishment did not know, then it must be something amazing.

While this was the first time Bez had come here, he had heard that this place was patronized by the highest circle of citizens. Perhaps tribal chiefs — on the level of kings — might come here.

Oi oi oi, what kind of amazing outfit was that... but honestly, where did that guy come from?

So he’s more amazing than a tribal chief? He wanted to ask that, but that might be taken

for agreeing to a trade of information. Bez had no intention of going any further, and so he shrugged.

"I heard he's a trader." *That sounds incredibly fake*, Bez thought, but he had said it anyway. "So I guess it's made of fabric from a distant land. Who knows, it might just be ordinary stuff over there."

"Surely you jest. If it really was cheap stuff, as you say, then he must have traded with very advanced nations... definitely not a country in the region."

"Doesn't that mean he must have come from a really faraway place, then?"

Though he said that, it was true that Bez was very interested in his client.

Bez felt that saying he was a trader was not too far from the truth. That was because he could not sense a hint of violence from his client — he felt like an ordinary person.

When he had hired them for the first time, one of Bez's friends, a beast warrior, had snorted and concluded that he was an easily beatable opponent. But the second round, he had started having his doubts.

For starters, the contents of this mission were quite strange, when one sat down and thought about it. It was like he was sending them in because he knew there would be something to find. Moreover, what would their client gain from learning about this?

It was as though he had been deliberately leaking information just now.

It felt like he was taking precautions to keep Bez from looking further into the matter, but also like he was deceiving him. If it was the former, it would allay the suspicions in his heart, but the dread in his heart would not go away if it were the latter.

However—

"I'm sorry. A client like that who pays without grumbling and who even foots the bill for my drinks is the best client I can hope for. There's nothing I can tell you."

—There was no need to go treading on the Dragon's tail.

The wealth of a city — no, three cities — was enough to make him drool. But if that man was backed by a country, then it would be bad if he bore a grudge.

Taking the treasure and fleeing to another country would be one thing, but the matter was not as simple as that. Sometimes, hatred could draw out unimaginable power. Bez did not want to spend the rest of his life being hunted by elite assassins hired by some country.

As long as the other guy did not betray him, Bez would not betray him either. That was Bez's secret of happiness.

"Is that so? Then I apologize."

The waiter brought out a bag filled with money. *What is this?* Bez asked with his eyes, and then the waiter replied, "The drinks are on the house, so I am returning the payment to you. Please come again, and please thank your client on our behalf."

This was probably an apology from the bar for prying about a customer, or was this hush money?

For a moment, Bez wanted to refuse it. But he decided that it would be a bad move, and it would sow the seeds of ill-will between him and this bar.

While he did not think it would be immediately life-threatening, that would depend on how the bar thought of that client. If he wanted to maintain ties with that client, then something might happen to Bez before he could tell the client unnecessary things.

In order to prevent himself from being silenced, he ought to take it.

In that case, I'd better not ask about the matter.

Bez snatched the purse away, somewhat annoyed.

"I'll be back."

It did not hurt to be polite.

"We'll be waiting."

After hearing the waiter speak from behind him, Bez stepped outside.

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Along the way, he opened the pouch the store attendant had given him and saw a valuable-looking gem among the gold coins. His employer had probably not given this to the store to pay for the drinks, so it would seem best to treat it as hush money.

Bez did not have the keen senses of a ranger or a thief, but he had senses of his own that had been honed after many battles. He deployed those senses fully and took a roundabout route back to his own inn to check if he was being followed.

Part of the inn's first floor was a cafeteria, and his friends were drinking in a corner.

"Yo."

He knew from a glance at the label of the wine bottle that this was better than the usual stuff — it was the best stuff that the inn had. Of course, it was nothing compared to the bar where Bez had just been drinking.

"Welcome back — looks like things ended uneventfully. You look happy, you smell of liquor, and you're back late."

The man who said this was around 120 centimeters tall. He was not a child, but a proper adult. He belonged to the humanoid race known as Hill Dwarves. While they were relatives of the Dwarves, they had an affinity for the ranger profession and keen senses of direction.

"After all, you'd have come back sooner if something had happened."

The speaker was a man whose spear was leaning against the wall. He had the head of a serpent and his entire body was covered in scales. He was a Snakeman, a demihuman race.

"Ahhh, he paid up the amount he promised. That said, he didn't pay extra."

"Hah, sounds like even if you did, you would have drunk it away. I don't touch alcohol, so don't take it out of the party funds."

"But you ate a whole pile of fresh meat, didn't you? You don't mind me taking *that* out of the party funds, do you?"

The person saying so was a humanoid make whose race was a relative of the Orcs. His muscular body made him seem twice the size of Bez. While one could call his race relatives of the Orcs, they were more like superior specimens of the same, much like the way Hobgoblins and Goblins were related.

The weapon on his waist was over two meters long, known as an odachi. He could skillfully employ it as a ronin.

In addition to those three, the two others who were not present made up Bez's companions.

"Right right, let's appraise it. Bez. take out the gems."

Bez handed the pouch with the gems to the Hill Dwarf. The Hill Dwarf upended its contents onto the table and began evaluating them by lamplight. He took a minute for each one before he was done. By that time, his friends had already finished counting the gold coins and informed him of the amount.

"Right. The sum's what we agreed on. The gems might sell for more or less depending on the buyer, but that's not our client's fault."

The Snakeman twisted his head at an angle that humans could not manage and looked at Bez. Even though he was used to looking at those eyes which betrayed no emotion, it still made Bez uncomfortable.

"Now then, why would he pay so much for such a simple job? Did you learn anything after a few drinks with him?"

That was why they had chosen to meet in that incredibly high-end establishment.

Considering the job was just to check out a city — even if it was infested with the undead, but only on the level of Zombies — this was a ridiculously generous sum. That was what had bothered Bez about their client's true intentions.

However—

"Not at all."

Bez shrugged. That was because he had concluded that it would be safer not to pry too deeply into this.

"Oi oi... isn't it possible that we might be visited by retrievers soon?"

"Beats me." Retrievers here referred to assassins and the like. "We did our job well. Don't you think he'd rather make use of us rather than kill us off?"

"Well, another job would put me somewhat at ease."

"What a shame. I did my best to put on a show, but the client didn't have a new job for us right away. He might be talking to his boss."

After verifying the earnest look in his friends' eyes, Bez began telling them about their conversation in the bar and his own postulations.

"Ah~ in that case, I think your conclusion is on the mark, Bez. Or rather, I can't think of anything else."

"Yup. He must be from some country. Ah~ is looting the treasure of three cities just a dream~"

The Hill Dwarf agreed with the Ork's words. Bez's mercenary band was a group of experts, and they were confident that they would not lose out to the troops in the region. But much like Bez, they did not want to spend their lives on the run.

"So what should we do next? We've taken a lot of jobs here. Resentment's starting to build up."

"That's true. Maybe we should head over to Soba. I heard the Tsar of the eastern countries is recruiting talented mercenaries. Might be a good idea to head there. In any case, we should prepare to move out."

After hearing his companions voice their approval, Bez nodded.

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Suzuki Satoru walked a short distance after leaving the bar and then took a turn into a small alley.

After ensuring that there was nobody in there, he cast <Perfect Unknowable.>

He waited there for almost a minute, but nobody entered that little alley.

It would seem he could be sure that he was not being followed. According to his experiences, Suzuki Satoru knew well that there were precious few entities in this world who were powerful enough to see through spells of this tier.

Suzuki Satoru cast *<Fly>* and *<Greater Teleportation>* in that order.

His destination was a point one kilometer above the city.

The clamor of the night could not reach that high. It was a place lit only by the gentle light of the moon.

Suzuki Satoru deftly folded his legs in mid-air and produced a map from his inventory, which he placed on his legs.

Now then... this place was converted to the undead as well. Which means...

He took out a pen and marked the cities which the mercenaries had visited.

Keno's eyes would have gone wide if she had seen this. The map was exquisitely drawn and depicted the countries near Keno's homeland. It had been made by spending a great deal of the gold coins stolen from "Corpus of the Abyss." If the intelligence personnel of the neighboring countries had seen this, they would have gladly spent money like water to obtain it.

During the five years since they had set off on their journey, Suzuki Satoru had spent a great deal of time conducting investigations, and he discovered that the Zombification had affected a very large area. While he was not sure exactly when each Zombification had taken place, analysis of the information he had collected suggested the time gap between each instance had not been very great.

The question of who had done this and their aims remained unclear, but it looked like it was not targeted at Keno, and it was very unlikely that "Corpus of the Abyss" had done this. If "Corpus of the Abyss" had a magic caster who could trigger a phenomenon like this over such a wide area, then they would not have been picked off one by one so easily.

The likelihood that this had not been accomplished through the personal power of the members of "Corpus of the Abyss," but by some item obtained from somewhere was similarly very low. Therefore, it would probably best not to tell Keno that hunting "Corpus of the Abyss" had been done to procure funds and to steal the research that

those undead beings had spent so much time compiling.

He had kept all these things from Keno because she was simply too soft-hearted.

Nobody else mattered to Suzuki Satoru besides himself and Keno. He simply acted with his interests as a priority. However, she would not have thought about things so simply. Therefore, doing so was also to avoid burdening her with excess guilt.

In that case — which place is the most suspicious? After analyzing the information I've collected, the Zombification seems to be limited to this region.

Suzuki Satoru's finger pointed to the safe cities, which had not been marked.

Which means—

Suzuki Satoru's line of sight shifted, and then stopped at a corner of the map.

The Zombification phenomenon radiated from a certain point in the mountain range there.

There was a legend surrounding those mountains.

There was a fountain of wisdom somewhere in the mountains, and soaking in it would grant one wisdom. But many trials stood in the way of getting there, and it was said that nobody could come back from it alive.

However, that mountain range was also a lair for Wyverns and other powerful monsters, so it was very likely that those monsters would make any venture in there a one-way trip even before one could throw one's life away in those trials.

It might be fun to verify this legend if he had the time, but there was something he had to do before that.

Suzuki Satoru quietly said the name of the highest peak in that mountain range.

“Kaidinias, huh.”

He had no proof that it was the source of the phenomenon. He had simply remembered the Brightness Dragon Lord, who resided on the highest peak of the continent.

After all, there was a very large margin of error when considering the scale of the map, even if he was looking for the center of a radiating spread.

If it really was there, the source of the phenomenon was a magic item, and it had triggered the Zombification during transportation, then there would truly be no hope. The difficulty of finding it would be like trying to find a pearl in the desert.

And even if it had been caused by someone, they probably would have run far away and hidden by then.

In that case, there was no way the sages of the nearby nations could not have thought of something that even Suzuki Satoru would have noticed.

But it was still possible.

Yes, it really was possible.

It was possible that nobody had sent out investigation parties.

Suzuki Satoru had used <Greater Teleportation> to travel between the surrounding countries, spent a great deal of resources, and even hired people to conduct investigation despite the lack of immediate returns.

If anyone else had done what Suzuki Satoru had, they would have been able to reach the same conclusion. However, there was probably nobody who had done so to date. Even if there were people who wanted to take action in order to verify their information, it would have taken them longer than Suzuki Satoru to obtain information of the same standard that he possessed.

That would mean Suzuki Satoru was probably the closest to unravelling this mystery.

In that case, he might be able to find something left behind there that might work as a clue.

However, going there would also be very troublesome. That was because he could not teleport to a place he had never been to before. He could only teleport to a city he could reach and then go on foot from there. Naturally, that would waste a lot of time, and so he would have to explain various things to Keno. He had barely managed to bluff his way through until now, and Suzuki Satoru's head ached when he thought about it.

Keno had not mentioned her homeland since two years ago.

Before that, she had been searching for a way to cure the Zombification and help her people. But ever since that say — no, several days before that, she had not brought it up again. After that, she seemed content to carry on in their adventures together.

Had she really let go of it, or had she simply buried it deep in her psyche? Suzuki Satoru could not tell which was the case. Or perhaps Keno had hidden it very well, or perhaps Suzuki Satoru was very bad at reading the hearts of others. Digging too deep into the hearts of others was not good either, which was how they had made it this far.

...I guess asking would have been fine. Even so, I didn't do anything. Was it because I didn't want to feel the helplessness of not being able to ease the suffering of a fellow travelling companion?

For Suzuki Satoru, the only people who had accompanied him on adventures for so long were the members of Ainz Ooal Gown, and by sheer length of time, Keno had surpassed even them. Therefore he had chosen not to poke at the matter in order to let his feelings remain in a comfortable place.

I'm really useless... but what will I do from now on?

Collecting this information had simply been a matter of interest on his part. At the same time, it was also to find a way to ease Keno's pain, even if just a little. However, after gathering so much information and pinpointing a suspicious location, he had started waffling instead.

He did not know if there were any merits to doing this. Quite a few demerits came to mind, however.

If there was someone there who had triggered this phenomenon — a wide-ranging event which had indiscriminately brought tragedy to people — then there was no way they could be normal. If he actually encountered that person, then surely battle would be unavoidable.

Was there any gain at all in opposing someone who could affect an area which even YGGDRASIL magic could not hope to reach?

It was not as though the Zombification would recur, and even if it happened again, it was very unlikely that it would affect Suzuki Satoru and Keno.

And if that change could even convert Overlords and Vampires into Zombies, then it would be safest to avoid dangerous people like that.

If it was merely due to the unusual functioning of an item, then recovering it might be a good idea... I definitely want to lay my hands on an unknown World-Class Item. However, if someone had deliberately done so, what would be the aim of triggering such a phenomenon?

Perhaps he would be able to formulate a response if he knew the opposition's aim, but right now he simply did not know enough.

Suzuki Satoru touched the World-Class Item in his belly.

Which is more dangerous, leaving it alone or investigating it?

If someone really was scheming in the shadows, then it would be a bad idea to give them time.

If they were on the level of the Brightness Dragon Lord and he sat back to watch them grow stronger, then all he could do was run and hide.

It seems the Dragon Lords are hostile to YGGDRASIL players... if someone like that keeps getting stronger, I won't be able to handle them by myself, right? I came out even with the Brightness Dragon Lord — no, it was only a draw because I ran away... well, if that's his limit, I'll be able to beat him next time.

He was not being a sore loser or being stubborn.

Both hiding his trump cards and enduring a one-sided offensive from his opponent was all in preparation for the next battle.

Suzuki Satoru had always done this when PVPing in YGGDRASIL. Due to the rule of victory going to the one who won two matches out of three, losing the first battle was not a problem. That did not change, even in his first life-or-death struggle in this world.

The advantage of this fighting style remained, even when fighting under extreme circumstances like not knowing if he could resurrect after death.

The strategy for certain victory that his former friend had taught him had not changed, even now.

—No.

It was precisely because he was battling under such a dire situation that he should place even more faith in his old friends.

That said, Suzuki Satoru did not want to fight an enemy of that level again. It was best to avoid danger.

The smart way of doing things was to only fight battles he was confident of winning and choosing to flee if he would lose.

Suzuki Satoru looked at the world.

Brilliant points of light remained, even as the world at night was cloaked in silence.

Perhaps his old friends might have said, “I want to protect this beautiful world!” or something like that. However, no such feeling overflowed in Suzuki Satoru’s heart.

However.

“This really pisses me off,” he muttered to himself.

Indeed.

Right now, Suzuki Satoru was well and truly pissed off.

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聖王の聖騎士一下
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4章 超越者たち

CHAPTER 4

THE BEYONDERS

1

“Say, Satoru, why did we come here?”

That suspicious mountain range was the destination of this journey.

Of particular note was the city near the Kaidinias Mountain Range.

It was a city of the Aina League, which was located near the mountains — in other words, a neighbor of Inveria — Seruk-3.

While it was not the capital of the Aina League, it was one of the largest cities in the surrounding countries, and it boasted a population of over 400,000 people. The two of them had been travelling towards the city on their covered wagon for four days now. Keno had no longer been able to contain herself and asked that question.

It had been five years since they left Inveria.

They had not even come near it until now, yet they had suddenly — in a great departure from their original direction of travel — moved towards Seruk-3, so it was hard to fault Keno for reacting like that.

In truth, he had no reason to continue hiding the truth from Keno. All he had to do was say, “This mountain range might contain the reason that you became undead, so I wanted to check it out.”

Even so, Suzuki Satoru could not bring himself to say it.

That was because even Suzuki Satoru could not explain his reasons for coming here.

On his part, curiosity was the biggest motivation for Suzuki Satoru to go there, but if he actually said that, Keno would have attacked his explanation from various angles

and then made him take the wagon elsewhere. If Keno had said, “There’s no reason for you to put yourself in danger, Satoru,” then Suzuki Satoru would only be able to reply, “Well, yes.”

The other reason was because Suzuki Satoru did not want to get Keno’s hopes up.

The greater one’s hopes and expectations rose, the greater the disappointment when they collapsed. It was just like how Suzuki Satoru had clung to the hope that his guildmates would return, and had fallen into despair when he realized that nobody had come.

Three years ago, Suzuki Satoru had seen Keno pretend to give up hope. In that case, what would happen if Suzuki Satoru gave her hope now?

Suzuki Satoru was clearly uneasy as he glimpsed the past — when he had first met Keno.

Therefore, Suzuki Satoru did his best to deceive her.

“Hm? There’s no special reason for it.”

“...Really?”

Keno turned to peek at Suzuki Satoru’s face, but Suzuki Satoru was not afraid. His skeletal face was expressionless and he did not have to worry about the beating of his heart.

In other words, he could probably lie without being found out.

However, the way Keno narrowed her eyes and kept peering at Suzuki Satoru made him feel a little uneasy. Though his body could not sweat, he still wiped the hands holding the reins on his robe anyway.

And then, Keno cut in.

“Li~ar.”

“I’m not lying,” Suzuki Satoru replied immediately. He was deceiving himself, that must have been it, that must have been why he could reply so quickly. Even he wanted to praise himself.

His words were immaculately ordered, and he had not shown any emotion. Surely anyone who heard them would think Suzuki Satoru was telling the truth. However...

"Yes, you are, Satoru. You must be in some sort of difficulty. I've been travelling with you for five years — even if it doesn't show on your face, I can tell if you're lying."

"..."

There was power in Keno's words, and he could sense her great confidence. She was certain that Suzuki Satoru had some other objective in mind. He wanted to say she was overthinking things, but she had seen right through Suzuki Satoru.

Suzuki Satoru unconsciously felt his face. It was cold, bony and skeletal, without any hint of expressions — how on earth could such a face produce emotions that Keno could read?

"...Well done, Keno," Suzuki Satoru sighed, as though giving up.

"Fufufu," Keno giggled happily.

"It's been five years. I can roughly guess what you're thinking. After all, I've been by your side all this time."

"...It's been five years, huh. Indeed, after such a long time it's possible you might be able to tell what mood I'm in just by looking at my face."

A character could not change their facial expressions in YGGDRASIL. The only way to tell how someone else was feeling was by their voice. Producing a normal voice and minimizing the times he sounded different was not a skill unique to Suzuki Satoru. When he had been depressed, someone else had also seen through how he had forced himself to appear jovial.

The words that person had said still lingered in his heart: "We're friends, after all, I guess we can still understand each other"

"—Indeed, that's right, Keno."

"Hm? What's wrong? Are you feeling lonely?... Or very happy? Satoru?"

"Ah... that's right. The way I feel about you being able to understand my feelings is

definitely not loneliness, Keno. If I had to put it into words... it would be gratitude.”

Suzuki Satoru released the reins in his hands.

He had made up his mind.

He had prepared himself for this.

He was filled with determination that would never waver.

For that reason, Suzuki told the lie he had prepared beforehand.

“Our destination is a city of the Aina League, Seruk No.3. I learned that there was a rare item there, and our objective this time is to recover it.”

“You’re... lying? I’m not too sure, but it still feels like you’re lying. Oh well, never mind. You’re hiding something, but you must be worried about me, right, Satoru?”

Suzuki Satoru hesitated over whether he should not, but doing so would mean admitting that he was lying to her.

“It’s fine, Satoru. Don’t worry about it. Just go.”

“Ah, thank you, Keno.”

As they approached the borders of the Aina League, they found their path blocked by a long defensive line. It was not made of heavy stone blocks, but a simple wooden fence.

It was not hard to imagine that it had been built to curb the spread of the Zombies. Such defensive structures would be enough to deal with Zombies, but the Zombies’ true threat lay in their numbers. If an entire nation’s worth of Zombies — in the millions — flooded in at once, it would be completely useless. However, a few short years would not be enough to build a kilometers-long fence around a nation’s borders.

He came to a stop some distance away and used *<Fly>* to quickly scout the area, but he did not find anything like a checkpoint. All the roads leading to the Aina Multiracial League had been sealed off. In addition, he had spotted patrols.

He knew that they probably would not let them through, even if he pleaded “Please let

us pass." Therefore, he used <Gate> to teleport them and the wagon ahead.

After that, they drove the wagon down unused roads. They felt there was no need to pretend to make camp at nightfall, so they maintained their speed and travelled day and night.

They passed through several cities filled with wandering Zombies and were less than a day away from Seruk-3. However, they sensed something was amiss.

"This is strange."

"Indeed, it's very strange."

They had seen all kinds of Zombies in Keno's country. Not all of them had been formerly human. It would seem all living things above a certain size had been converted into Zombies. In the wild, they had encountered plodding animal Zombies. That much was the same in the Aina Multiracial League.

However, they were nowhere to be seen as they approached Seruk-3.

Perhaps someone had exterminated the Zombies, but typically they would have eliminated the animal Zombies outdoors as well.

That was the problem.

Suzuki Satoru looked straight ahead. Seruk-3 lay down the road ahead of him, and beyond that was Mt. Kaidinias.

If this phenomenon was limited to the surrounding area, then there must have been some kind of connection there.

Nothing else happened after that, and they arrived at the main gate of Seruk-3. After that, the mountain range descending from Mt. Kaidinias slowly came into view.

The gate showed off the size and splendor of the city.

The Aina Multiracial League had originally been a country formed from the union of many races. Among them were highly intelligent Giants. That was probably the link here.

However, they had not seen any Zombies in the vicinity.

In some cities, one could see Zombies spilling out from the city gate, but there were none in sight here. Certainly, that would not be the case if the gate was shut.

But the gates were wide open.

...Could this city have some kind of protection which prevented it from being zombified?

Suzuki Satoru immediately dismissed that notion.

The population of Seruk-3 was 400,000.

Surely that many survivors would have caused a huge uproar. If they had not abandoned the city, then they would have stayed here, and they would have taken extensive security measures.

However, not a single whisper had come from Seruk-3, to say nothing of any security.

It was true that they were some distance away. But things were too quiet, even at this distance.

There were no residents and no Zombies. It was as though this city had been abandoned.

Did someone come here and clear out the Zombies? It's not entirely impossible, but then why didn't they liberate the other cities along the way? Or have they all been dominated by an undead of some power, like "Corpus of the Abyss"?

Indeed, this place was quite a good location when considering the distance from the cities of the living and the surrounding zombification. Since it was a major city, it ought to have magical items and books for research.

"This place really is suited for an undead magician."

After muttering to himself, the Keno in his head began lecturing him, and so Suzuki Satoru had no choice but to concentrate and think seriously.

However, they lacked information. It would seem he had no choice but to enter the city.

“...Say, Satoru. Are you going into the city? The closer we get to it, the fewer Zombies we see... this is the first time we’ve encountered something like this.”

“While I didn’t come here for that reason... it seems I’ll need to conduct some investigations.”

Suzuki Satoru was at a loss for what to do with Keno after this.

Should he cast *<Create Fortress>* outside the city to make a fortress and have her stay in there? Or should he bring her into the city with him? While he would like to be able to draw on her knowledge, he ought to keep her in a safe place.

Seruk-3 was nothing more than a base camp to investigate the mountain range. He had only come here for ease of teleportation.

He had not expected something abnormal like this to happen here. When he thought calmly about it, he realized that he had never once considered the possibility that the culprit and cause for everything might not have come from the mountains, but this city instead. It was a frustrating error.

“I want to go too. Ah, perhaps you might think that it’s dangerous and that you’re going to leave me here by myself, but I know more about magical lore than you do. Therefore, I’m going with you, and if there’s fighting — you’ll protect me, won’t you, Satoru?”

“—Ah. Yes. I will protect you. That’s my job — you’re in charge of the intellectual work, while I take care of anything involving violence.”

In truth, he would feel better with Keno around if it turned out that there were clues present.

That being the case, could Suzuki Satoru, as the person responsible for brute force, protect Keno when under threat?

It should be possible.

He had managed to keep Keno safe even when his opponent was the Brightness Dragon Lord — the most powerful foe he had faced to date. To be precise, he had bought them time to flee. However, only a fool would act in a blind and arrogant way. He had to plot his course carefully for the sake of the future, and he could not be careless this time either.

"Keno, I'm giving you the usual crystal. If I give the signal or if you get attacked, you have to use it without hesitating, okay?"

The item he had produced from his inventory was a spell-sealing crystal imbued with <Greater Teleportation>.

Spell-sealing crystals were one of the rarest magic items. In turn, they were also very easy to use, and at high levels they were employed in large quantities. As a result, Suzuki Satoru did not have many on him and there were almost no spell-sealing crystals in the gear his friends had left him.

He had entrusted this valuable item to her for safety's sake.

Suzuki Satoru could destroy Keno in a single attack. Therefore, if he met an opponent that was on his level, they could probably do the same thing.

It was only appropriate that they take extensive precautions so that they could deal with such an encounter.

As Suzuki Satoru handed the crystal over, he wondered if the spell infused into it was appropriate.

<Perfect Unknowable> might have been more useful for fleeing, but <Greater Teleportation> was the best choice if he wanted to increase the chances of Keno's survival.

Keno using <Perfect Unknowable> might not be enough to guarantee that there were no mishaps.

While he had scrolls containing <Perfect Unknowable>, a low-level magic caster like Keno would not be able to use them. Wands could not contain such a spell, so Suzuki Satoru did not have one. If he wanted one, he would need a World-Class Item that could allow him to make requests of the developers. Perhaps Keno could have used a staff, but unfortunately Suzuki Satoru did not have staves imbued with <Perfect Unknowable>.

<Perfect Unknowable> appeared to be a very effective spell at a glance, but its inability to be applied to others meant that it saw surprisingly little use in party play. While it was possible that ambushers might use it, both Suzuki Satoru and enemies of Momonga's level had many spells or abilities to see through it.

In the worst case scenario, one might end up being invisible to friends but not to enemies, which would mean that they could not be healed or supported by their friends.

Simply put, many players considered <Perfect Unknowable> to be a spell that was used on themselves when facing lower-level opponents or numerous opponents.

Therefore, the average player did not learn that spell, but instead used consumable items to make up the shortfall.

Suzuki Satoru was the reverse. Since he could cast many spells, he chose to learn it himself rather than rely on consumables. Therefore, he could not give her any appropriate items at a time like this.

He had not expected that practice to end up being a handicap at a time like this.

“Mm, got it. Should I set the teleport destination to the usual place?”

Suzuki Satoru expressed his agreement.

There was a small house in a city over 2,000 kilometers away that he had set as one of their teleport destinations.

After that, Suzuki handed over a legacy-class item known as the Ghillie Cloak to Keno.

While it looked like a tattered cape with cloth and strings dangling from it, it was an item that conferred exceptional stealth capabilities.

While it was almost useless without concealment skills, it also possessed effects in addition to that, and those additional effects were quite good.

Even the level 100 Suzuki Satoru would see Keno as a blur — as though she were blending into the landscape — once Keno put it on. It was very effective against adversaries with low perceptive abilities.

Incidentally, Suzuki Satoru had forgotten who he had bought it from and he only had the one piece, so he had kept it in its original state.

He told Keno — who was blurred and indistinct thanks to the Ghillie Cloak’s powers — to cast <Fly> and <Invisibility>.

The two of them looked down on the city from above.

The lack of obstructions meant that their opponents would have a clear view of them too, so it was very likely that they would be attacked. On the other hand, it also meant that it was easy to collect information while flying.

After weighing the former against the latter, Suzuki Satoru decided that the latter was more important. Of course, he had also used <Delay Teleportation> and other such spells to protect himself. If they were attacked, he would be able to protect Keno as well if he was nearby. That was the power of his gauntlet, the legacy-class item Guardian Heroes.

As they looked over the city, the abnormality of this place became even more apparent.

“Satoru... there’s nobody here at all.”

“Yes, there’s nobody here, and — there aren’t any Zombies around either.”

After checking their surroundings, he pondered the strangeness of this city as he descended to ground level with Keno.

The possibility that came to mind was that someone had invaded the city and then wiped out 400,000 Zombies.

But that would probably be very difficult to do.

It was not that they would lose to Zombies, the weakest of the undead, but at the very least they would have left corpses behind.

Corpses vanished over time in YGGDRASIL, as did those of Zombies. But in this world, the Zombies’ corpses should have remained forever after being struck down. Of course, dead Zombies would begin to rot and after a while they would become skeletonized, and after that the bones would disintegrate.

As an aside, moving Zombies would not rot or harbor maggots because they were animated by negative energy. However, the loss of negative energy once they were defeated meant that they would rot as normal, flies could lay eggs in them, and small animals would gnaw on them.

It had been over 40 years since that incident.

Was it possible that someone had buried or cremated 400,000 corpses—

“—Keno, do you think an army invaded this place, killed all the Zombies, buried them and then left?”

“I doubt it. While you could take about 10,000 soldiers to dig a huge hole and then bury them all in it, it would be very obvious and there are no signs of it now.”

“What about cremation?”

“It sounds even less likely. After killing a Zombie, you could just throw it into a house and burn them with it. But on the whole, I don’t see any signs of burning.”

Currently, Suzuki Satoru had not seen any similar signs either.

It was clear that Keno had examined the area more carefully than Suzuki Satoru, but that was no cause for alarm. That had become a clearly established fact during their five-year journey.

“If there were a way to do it, then surely it would be an assembly of high-level priests turning undead at the same time, right?”

“I see...”

That would have disintegrated the Zombies, and it would explain their absence. However, there was a limit to how many times one could turn undead each day, and low-level priests could not use that ability often. Therefore, it would probably be impossible to annihilate a swirling horde of 400,000 Zombies without committing sizable numbers to the task.

While news would leak more easily as more people took part, Suzuki Satoru had not heard about anything like that even though he had kept his feelers out and listening.

“Or could it have been a ‘super-tier spell’ like the kind you cast, Satoru? Of course, the existence of a spell with that area of effect would be another matter entirely, but we won’t be able to tell if we don’t enter the city, right?”

“That’s true. We’ll proceed with caution, then.”

“Yup!”

The two of them entered through the city gates.

While <Phase Door> would have made entering the city safer, they had to discover what had happened and if anyone was hiding within by using themselves as bait.

Naturally, Suzuki Satoru would be fine even if he were attacked from inside the city, so he walked in front of Keno to block the line of fire to her. While it would be pointless if the enemy used an area- effect attack, he would be an excellent shield for her against single-target attacks.

They passed through the city gates without incident, and they saw a wide street.

This was probably the largest street in the city.

There were no signs of Zombies in this place which should have been lively and bustling, and they could not hear anything despite pricking up their ears. All that remained was a nauseating silence.

It looked as though all the city's residents had abandoned it. However, it did not feel like they had left of their own free will. The goods in the stores remained in place — though they were spoilt or rusted — and after checking, even the coins were still in place.

While it did not seem like they had left of their own free will, it did not seem like someone had invaded either.

No — is it possible someone whose objective was not money had invaded this place?

Magic items were more precious than mountains of gold and silver. If this city had a powerful magic item, then it might be more valuable than all the wealth in this city.

However, that theory was also suspect. While one could not rule out the possibility that such an item existed, surely there ought to be a more elegant way of obtaining it. Like say, sending someone with thief skills to sneak into the city and so on.

“Ah, Satoru. You can dominate the undead, can’t you, Satoru? Can you use that ability to order Zombies to go outside?”

“It’s possible, but there are various conditions for dominating the undead. For instance, there are limits on the maximum number of undead that can be controlled

at one time and how powerful of an undead being can be dominated. If everyone in this city became a Zombie, then guiding them anywhere would be annoyingly repetitive.”

“Even so, if they were undead, surely they could ignore their lifespans and do it over and over again, right?”

“You mean a cabal of undead beings like ‘Corpus of the Abyss?’ While it’s not impossible... do you mean they’d be walking around and dominating undead over and over again inside this city? If it were me, I think it would have been fine to leave them alone since I was undead and wouldn’t have been attacked anyway... mm, if that really was the case, then I’d have to take my hat off to their diligence.”

“What if it were because of an item?”

“From what I know, there are no unlimited-use items like that.”

If such a balance-breaking item did exist, it would probably be a World-Class Item or something similar.

“...Hm. I can’t break through the limits of my imagination no matter how much I think. We really do need information after all.”

“Then how about taking a look in the castle?”

Keno was pointing to the castle of the marquis who ruled the surrounding lands. It was situated on a small hill and they could clearly tell how solid its walls were.

Suzuki Satoru agreed with that suggestion.

If there were any traces left behind, they would probably find them in the castle. After all, it was the most luxurious and comfortable place in the city, which made it perfect as a home base. Also, the castle sported several imposing towers, which made it feel like the ideal place for overlooking the city.

The two of them cast *<Fly>* spells and headed toward the castle in a beeline.

If they looked down, they would see an empty city below them. It was a hollow metropolis, without so much as the presence of small animals. Having Zombies wandering around would probably have made it less scary.

“Still, there’s no movements here at all.”

While he had coolly spouted some stuff about movements and the like, Suzuki Satoru was not very clear about what he was saying. However, it was true that certain monsters had an overwhelming presence about them. The monster he had encountered with the most powerful presence was the Brightness Dragon Lord.

“...Was this city destroyed by something else... hm?”

“A plague? Poison? But that would be weird, no? If a plague had broken out here, then they would have burned the victims, and I think there would be signs of that within the city.”

They had found what looked like paupers’ districts when they were observing the city from above, but no traces that looked like scorch marks.

Just as Suzuki Satoru was beginning to admire Keno’s focus, she continued speaking.

“Since there were no such signs in the pauper’s district, where a disease would have the highest chance of spreading, I think that would rule out such a possibility.”

Suzuki Satoru had not thought that far ahead. He had to hand it to Keno.

“In that case — did the destruction of this city lead to some kind of chain-reaction zombification? For example, was it because a monster with an instant death aura was walking around inside the city or something?”

“But if that were the case, wouldn’t it be strange that there were no corpses? It’s as though everyone here suddenly vanished. And it would also be very strange for people setting out from this place to abandon all their wealth...”

Suzuki Satoru and Keno tilted their heads in bafflement.

When they reached the castle, the two of them walked inside without any hesitation.

Keno held Suzuki Satoru’s hand.

This was a bad move in a dangerous place.

Fighting while holding someone’s hand was very disadvantageous. However, Suzuki

Satoru held Keno's hand tightly without saying a word.

After that, they did a quick survey of the castle, but they could not find any traces. Of course, neither Suzuki Satoru or Keno were detector-types, so they would not have been able to spot any high-level thieves hiding in here. However, there was a piece of evidence which made them conclude otherwise.

"The dust is in piles. It looks like this castle was left empty a long time ago, and nobody else came in either."

It looked like the castle had been abandoned before the undead conversion had begun, or perhaps the city had been abandoned with it.

"What should we do?"

"After a quick look around, we haven't spotted any signs that anything happened in the castle. First, let's go take a look at the treasury. There might be powerful items inside."

"Yup."

They broke the sturdy door and negated the magical traps with Suzuki Satoru's magical resistance, then proceeded to plunder all the treasure within. That said, it had not been done for acquiring money, but more because Suzuki Satoru was interested in acquiring rare items.

The appraisal of the treasure took place as it was being looted, so it finished over an hour after the robbery was complete.

"No powerful items here."

"Yeah. While there were no powerful items, it seems there are quite a few pieces with historic value."

While he knew that they were accessories and the like, that was all he knew. And while Keno, responsible for the knowledge work, was familiar with art, magic, noble society, and so on, she was not learned enough to determine whether or not a particular object was historically significant. All she understood was that it looked valuable.

"We won't be able to sell them, right?"

“Yeah. I won’t sell them, anyway. After all, we have money to spare. Plus, it would be troublesome if we got wrapped up in annoying things after selling something with a history.”

Keno laughed happily.

“After all, the YGGDRASIL item you sold caused an incredible ruckus, Satoru.”

Suzuki Satoru could not help but be embarrassed. Looking back now, it had been a pretty good experience, but he wanted to apologize to Keno for the trouble he had caused her back then.

“I won’t repeat that mistake again. After all, standing out isn’t a good thing, especially for undead beings like us.”

This world ran on the axiom that the undead were the enemies of all living beings. The two of them were heretics for wanting to enter the world of the living. They were practically traitors.

“Still, we managed to help someone in trouble because you sold that, right, Satoru? I don’t think your judgement was wrong.”

Keno seemed to have misunderstood something. He could not care less if some human he did not know lived or died. Ever since his body had ended up like this, he had not felt anything like love for his fellow man or whatnot. The only important things to Suzuki Satoru were his friends.

“—Hm? What’s wrong, Satoru?”

“No, nothing’s wrong, Keno. Still, we need to let an appraiser look at them. However, if they’re from too far away, it’ll decrease their historical value. What a pain.”

“While I’ve told you this before, you don’t need to worry about my share, right? After all, you gave me all sorts of things, didn’t you?”

“Don’t worry about that. After all, it’s only natural for a senpai to take care for his kouhai.”

As undead beings, they had no daily expenses. While it was not as though they could not live without selling accessories which might have historical value, they were items

obtained through their adventures, so he had to reimburse half their value in cash to Keno.

He took that sort of thing seriously even between guild members. He could not be lax on that.

“Also, our travelling expenses were all paid by you, weren’t they, Keno? These things need to be split evenly, so would I do something dumb like not sharing the money we obtained with you? Let’s not talk about who does more or less work, okay? We divided the jobs up into knowledge and the use of force... hm? So we’ve got an operational allowance but no managerial allowances?”

Keno looked at Suzuki Satoru with a baffled expression on her face, as if to say, “What the hell are you talking about?”

“Ahem! Uh, anyway, that’s why. We need to share everything valuable evenly. Got it?”

“Uh, um. Thank you, Satoru.”

“No, you really don’t need to thank me. After all, we’re moving as a team, and I need your strength from time to time, Keno.”

“But, I don’t know how I’ve helped...”

“Well, you’re better in the artistic department, and now you’re better than me in terms of magical knowledge, right? We’ll have to look to the future. In other words, this is an investment.”

“I understand, Satoru. I’ll work hard!”

He did not mind even if she did not go out of her way to work hard. Keno had been incredibly helpful even as she was now. However, rejecting her determination might mentally scar her, so he decided to accept her.

“Hm, we’ll go with that, then, Keno.” As he saw Keno looking delighted, Suzuki Satoru remembered the reason he had come here. “Now then, let’s continue looking around this castle a little more and look for the reason why there are no undead in this city.”

“What should we do?”

"Oh yes, there's the top and bottom. Let's check the bottom first."

"The gaol? Given that this big castle wasn't meant to be used as a fortress, I think usually they'd build a prison elsewhere, don't you think?"

"But wasn't there a gaol in your castle, Keno?"

"Yeah, there was. But it wasn't used for normal people, only to briefly confine high-status people. It didn't look like it had been used ever since I was born."

"Perhaps there's a gaol like that here too. Let's go take a look. If it's not there, we'll look in the city and check inside the cells in the guards' duty posts."

They found the gaol soon enough, but it was empty. The interior was piled high with dust as well, so there probably had not been anyone inside it.

"What a shame. Let's continue heading upwards, then. I saw several towers when observing this castle from the outside — let's go check out the surroundings from there."

"Yup!"

Perhaps the highest tower had been used as a landing platform for flying monsters, because it was very wide and very heavily defended against attack and invasion.

"Uwah~"

Keno exclaimed in delight at the panoramic view of the city.

Suzuki Satoru thought, *You saw it all from the air while using <Fly>, so why does this scenery excite you so much?* However, he was smart enough to not actually say that.

When Suzuki Satoru had set foot upon the peak hailed as the highest in the world, he too had been moved by the way he could see everything from the summit. But what had truly left the deepest impression on him was the battle which had followed.

Suzuki Satoru watched Keno run around in circles and looking around in all directions, and as he saw her display a childishness that matched her appearance, he smiled.

After that, he began examining the city, with the mindset that someone had to do what

they came to this city for, even if it was just himself. Then, he found something which bothered him.

While there were three gates leading into the urban area of the city, the gate leading to the mountain range seemed to have been split open.

“Keno, look at that. What do you make of it?”

“Hm~ it doesn’t look like it was broken from the outside, but burst from the inside? Although... if it wasn’t destroyed by some terrible strength... how should I put it?”

“Want to go take a look?”

After receiving Keno’s approval, Suzuki Satoru cast *<Fly>* and the two of them headed straight for it. And then—

“Satoru, this is...”

“Yeah, you’re right. Something strange happened here... no, in this city too.”

One of the doors of the gate they had reached was leaning to one side. It had not been caused by age. And he could see the forms of the city’s residents there.

No, it would be better to say that they had once been the residents of the city.

Countless bones were scattered in front of the gate, within the gate, and behind it. They looked like they had been trampled to bits.

He did not know whether to call it a coincidence, but there should have been many more bones which had been pulverized into a powder and swept away thanks to exposure to the elements.

And since the bones had been crushed, there was no way to tell how they had died.

“I trust there’s no doubt that these were once the city’s residents?”

“Yeah... did some emergency occur, some confusion that caused everyone to flee for their lives? Or were they turned into Zombies, dominated, and then herded outside?”

“Probably the latter. I don’t see any luggage scattered around, only bones and clothing.”

An investigation of the tumbled bones revealed rings and other such items, but there were no gems or other things one would have taken with them while fleeing.

Suzuki Satoru looked beyond the door — at the place where the Zombies of this city had probably been headed.

“...If someone used <Create Undead>, the undead produced would be under the control of their maker”

After realizing what Suzuki Satoru was trying to say, a look of shock appeared on Keno’s face.

She could see a tall, steep mountain.

It was Mt. Kaidinias.

Its summit was wreathed in clouds and she could not make it out.

Suzuki Satoru took out his map and checked to see where the large road extending from the gate would lead.

This road seemed to circle around the base of Mt. Kaidinias and led to other cities. If they went down it, they would be able to reach other countries.

“Now then — stay here, Keno.”

“A-Ah, could I not? Would that be alright?”

Keno spoke in a frightened tone. She had probably understood the real reason why Suzuki Satoru had come to this city.

“It’ll be fine, Keno. This was why we hunted “Corpus of the Abyss.” You heard it from those guys too, didn’t you? Intelligent undead beings of great power remain animated even when their creator is destroyed. Even if I annihilate the mastermind behind the zombification, it won’t affect you, Keno.”

“No! That’s not what I mean!! I’m worried about you, Satoru!!!”

“—Huh?”

“I mean, this is a being that turned so many people in such a large area into the undead! It’s definitely not normal! Even you couldn’t do it, Satoru!”

“Ah, hm. I couldn’t do something like that.”

“In that case! In that case!” Keno’s face twisted in agony, and then she instantly resumed her normal expression before it kinked up again. “Doesn’t that mean there’s a chance you might get defeated, Satoru!?”

Indeed, that was true. He ought to admit it. He could not definitively state that “It won’t happen.”

“Ah, Satoru. Did you enjoy our travels together?”

“—Yeah. I was as happy as I had been with my former friends. Yes. I was happy, really, I was.”

He understood why those World Searchers had kept doing all those things he felt were pointless. He also understood the joy of exploring the world that the management and the developers wanted to give to the players.

His journey with Keno had been a very enjoyable one.

“In that case, why don’t we keep travelling? I’m undead like you, so we can travel forever, can’t we, Satoru? Let’s go and see a broader world! There’s so many places we haven’t seen before! Can you forget about this, please?”

“...I could. It’s not right to do something my friends don’t like. Trying to put someone in my debt would only vex them.”

“Y-Yes. Let’s, let’s go travelling together, forever, okay? Just the two of us. We’re undead, after all! Don’t do dangerous things and continue travelling with me...”

That was correct.

Suzuki Satoru had no right to determine Keno’s happiness. If travelling together was happiness, then would he not be showing kindness to Keno by doing so? However—

“Keno Fasris Invern!” Suzuki Satoru shouted, and Keno’s shrank away from him.

“Y-Yes... I’m sorry, Satoru. Please don’t get mad...”

“I’m not angry... Being a princess should be a job, right?”

“Huh?”

Keno’s mouth hung open in a stupid-looking way. She was probably showing how she could not keep up with the sudden change in topic and did not understand his meaning. Suzuki Satoru mocked himself in his heart. *Ah, it couldn’t be avoided.*

“Like I was saying, being a princess is a job, right?”

“Is, is it? It doesn’t feel that way to me...”

“So, does that mean kings and queens are unemployed? Is that not how it is?”

“When you put it that way, that might be the case... is it?”

“Now, on to the next item; gaining the approval of more than half of the guild’s members — well, there’s only one person, but that counts as more than half.”

A baffled look appeared on Keno’s face.

“In addition, you’re a heteromorphic creature of the type known as a Vampire, Keno. In other words, you have cleared all the requirements. Now then, Keno Fasris Invern. I recognize you as a member of Ainz Ooal Gown. You shall be the 42nd member. Or should I say, the second member of the New Ainz Ooal Gown?”

Ainz took out the ring of Ainz Ooal Gown from his inventory and gave it to Keno.

Keno’s expression flashed from shock to normality to shock again.

She had heard Suzuki Satoru talk about how important that ring was to him countless times. It stirred her emotions up enough that they had to be forcibly suppressed.

“Can... I?”

“Yes. Keno, you’re one of us now, a member of Ainz Ooal Gown. You have the right to take this ring.”

Of course, this ring would only be truly useful in a place like Nazarick. Without Nazarick, it was simply the proof that one was a member of the guild.

...And now there are two members of Ainz Ooal Gown... who knows, it might be a good idea to find another 58 members in this world.

“Thank you, Satoru!”

Keno put the ring on delightedly, as though she had forgotten what had happened just now.

Suzuki Satoru watched her, and then faked a cough before speaking.

“Now then, Keno. To me, there is one thing I cannot tolerate under any circumstances. And that would be — forgiving anyone who has done wrong by a member of the guild and who is still at large.”

“No, it’s just a little hardship. Travelling with you—”

Suzuki Satoru did not let Keno finish her sentence.

“—I might be able to turn your zombified parents back into human beings.”

Keno froze, and her eyes wavered.

“...Keno, this is what you hoped for, isn’t it? To stay as one of the undead, and resurrect your parents, am I wrong? Or do you want to become human, along with your parents?”

“Can, can you do it?”

“I don’t know. But Keno, nothing would delight you more, am I right?”

Keno looked in all directions, and then she lowered her head and quietly replied, “Yes.”

In that case — Suzuki Satoru’s course was set.

It was only natural that a guildmaster would fight for his guild members.

“—Keno.”

Keno raised her head suddenly as she heard the iron in his voice.

"Do not let your guilt bind you. There is no need for that at all. I must go, first to see what caused this all to happen, and then, depending on the circumstances — I'm very sorry, Keno, but you must stay here."

Keno hesitated for a few seconds, and then she nodded.

She was no fool. She understood that she would be holding him back.

"Now then, I'll use <Create Fortress> to build a fort some distance away. You don't mind staying in there, do you?"

2

After leaving Keno in the fortress that he had made, Suzuki Satoru stared at Mt. Kaidinias — its slopes were barren, with little vegetation. It was time to switch mindsets.

The first problem was how to investigate the destination to which the city's residents had headed.

He had a higher chance of figuring it out if he cast <Fly>, but if there were enemies around he would be spotted easily while floating in the air, as opposed to if he were on the ground. While he had <Perfect Unknowable> to use with it, there was a certain reason why Suzuki Satoru considered it a bad move.

A steady and grounded approach would be best.

While he ought to have cast <Fly> to search from above if there were no enemies, Suzuki Satoru was certain that there was a powerful enemy around.

Of course, while he could not be certain that all the information he had gathered to date was accurate, he was sure that there was some intelligent being behind all this.

His basic objective was to defeat that enemy, and then rescue Keno and her parents from their undead transformation. Ideally, he would be able to restore everyone in Keno's country.

The chances were annoyingly high that he would not be able to negotiate a settlement with this adversary. After all, he had caused so much damage. At the very least, he was probably a being like Suzuki Satoru, who held no love for others.

Then again, there was a small chance that they might be able to make a deal. The problem would then be the terms that the other party would set.

To begin with, he did not think the other party would make any material requests like asking for treasure and the like. After all, if he had wanted, he could have ordered the undead residents to deliver it all to him. He had made and could command them, after all. However, all the valuables in that city had been abandoned.

Then could he defeat his foe and demand that he do so in exchange for his life?

Is that possible? Is my opponent someone I can hold back on and still accomplish that?

Suzuki Satoru had already acknowledged his foe as being on his level. No, he imagined said foe to be stronger than him. However, it was hard to imagine a being more powerful than himself.

He had collected information on many mighty beings during his five-year journey. While he had learned it through money or force from various knowledgeable individuals, what they all agreed on was that the mightiest beings in this world were the ones known as the Dragon Lords. In fact, he had already confirmed that one of them had the same fighting power as he had.

However, one could not say it was far stronger than himself.

In that case, he should be able to use strategy and tactics to triumph against his opponent — even if it was a Dragon Lord.

Still, I have the feeling that I'm heading into the enemy's lair. That gives them the terrain advantage. After that... Suzuki Satoru recalled the lessons contained in PKing For Dummies. Right after a patch — that would be the right time. Powerful players attacking in small groups — that's the people united. So what about this time? I don't know. Only... it's going to be a gamble. (TL Note: this refers to an essay by Meng Zi / Mencius. It is best to go to war when the time is right, the terrain is favorable, and social conditions allow for it (i.e the people are united)

Of course, all this was founded on the assumption that the culprit responsible for the

zombification could restore the people to normal, or that he knew how to do it.

If that was not the case—

“—Then he shall pay the price for his foolishness.”

Suzuki Satoru changed his gear.

He put away all the equipment he had obtained from YGGDRASIL and dressed in the gear he had stolen from “Corpus of the Abyss,” save for a divine-class ring on his left hand.

After that, he wore an icon of “Corpus of the Abyss” around his neck. He also had a crystal with a spell sealed into it.

Truthfully speaking, Suzuki Satoru was much weaker now than he had been just now. Leaving aside the tremendous drop in his ability modifiers and defensive power, his resistances were now riddled with holes.

While he still had the HP of someone of his level, he could not place too much faith in that. In addition, he had to avoid any attacks which would instantly kill him.

There's one more thing, how should I do it? I'll prepare a bit more before reaching my destination.

Suzuki Satoru sent a <Message> to Keno, telling her that he would need a little more time.

After that, he teleported to his objective.

After finishing his preparation — which had taken quite some time — Suzuki Satoru returned to his original location and began moving by way of <Fly>. He advanced toward the mountain without lifting too far off the ground — it felt like gliding — and thought about his strategy as he did.

The occasional fallen bone pointed the way to his destination. While they had been crushed to powder and blown away, the denuded mountain was very obvious.

Suzuki Satoru lacked any tracking skills, but he followed the clear traces up the mountain. It was as though the bones were guiding Suzuki Satoru to the being who

had made them like this in revenge.

He climbed the mountain without losing his way, and soon—

Ahhh, we're here. An undead being, hm.

His undead detection skill was something like an omnidirectional radar. There was a blip on that radar.

Suzuki Satoru looked in that direction.

“—Is it over there? Is the culprit behind all this over there?”

This skill could only sense the presence of the undead, not tell him their identity or their abilities. While it was largely conjecture, the creature that had turned the city's people into Zombies and brought them here ought to be over there.

Having cast *<Fly>* on himself, Suzuki Satoru advanced a step forward, then ground to a halt, standing stock still.

Although his face could not display any changes in expression — perhaps Keno might have been able to discern them — Suzuki Satoru's face had gone stiff.

That was because the number of undead reactions had rapidly increased with just a single step.

What's this...

The sheer number of blips stacking onto each other made whatever it was seem like a huge ball of light.

Suzuki Satoru held his ground and looked straight ahead. The terrain was very rocky, so he could not see the location of the ball of light.

Did it gather Zombies, bind them together and then do something with them?... What should I do? Should I send a Zombie over to see what's going on, then think about what to do next after I figure out my opponent's identity? But...

That approach posed a problem.

If his enemy was very intelligent or possessed magical knowledge, then this would be a poor move. Also — Suzuki Satoru snorted. *Things being what they are, what are you thinking*, Suzuki Satoru mocked himself.

Suzuki Satoru dispelled the <Fly> spell and began walking.

Suzuki Satoru's mana recovery would not have been affected even if he had not dispelled the <Fly>. However, sustaining the <Fly> spell might lead to his mana recovery going into the negative once he started casting other spells. More to the point, he had to consider that things might develop in a bad direction if he showed his opponent that he could cast the <Fly> spell.

Suzuki Satoru continued walking.

Suzuki Satoru sensed the number of undead reactions growing with every step he took.

"Ahhh, I don't have any basis for this, but I think I can guess what it is," Suzuki Satoru muttered to himself. YGGDRASIL also had an undead monster which resembled the one he was imagining, but that undead would only display as a single undead reaction.

"Now then — <False Data - Life>, <False Data - Mana>."

Suzuki Satoru cast two spells on himself.

Then, he shifted his mind into PVP mode.

—No.

He had shifted into PK mode.

The terrain at his destination was surprisingly open. A corner of the mountain was abnormally flat and expanded in all directions. It was over two kilometers in length and breadth. Surely that could not have been some naturally-occurring prodigy.

There was no doubt that it had been created by the power of magic.

And then, before Suzuki Satoru's eyes — a bizarre object made of the people that had once lived in the city came into view.

A gigantic ovoid mass made of countless corpses stacked one on top of the other sat in the middle of this plaza. Its size was enough to make onlookers gasp in awe. To think something so big could be made from gathering 400,000 people together.

Had the opposition gathered all these Zombies just to make an object like this? Suzuki Satoru could not fathom what his opponent was thinking. No, if there was some aim to making this, then surely it would be able to move.

“Is it some kind of armor? Or perhaps a sentry?”

As Suzuki Satoru conjectured, he mentally calculated various things in his head while striding boldly into the plaza, toward that object which he would tentatively call the Big Ball of Undeath.

Though the distance between them shrank steadily, the Big Ball of Undeath did not make any obvious moves. Was it because Suzuki Satoru had not entered its attack radius, or was it simply following orders not to attack? Perhaps it was as stupid as a Zombie and did not attack Suzuki Satoru because it considered him one of them? Or perhaps—

—Who was the one who said it? Ah, yes. It was Luci★Fer-san. How did it go again? When we gaze at our enemy, our enemy is also gazing at us. What a marvellous quote. How shall I put this, it's quite meaningful. Wasn't Luci★Fer-san pretty smart?

Suzuki Satoru smiled as he waxed nostalgic over the words of his friend, and then he shouted to the Big Ball of Undeath:

“Alright, alright, what are you gathering Zombies here for?”

There was no answer save the mountain wind blowing quietly past him.

This was no longer just a lack of reaction — it was actively ignoring Suzuki Satoru. It was just like talking to a wall. It would be terribly embarrassing if this Big Ball of Undeath was completely nonsapient.

“...What's the matter? Keeping quiet because you're afraid of me? How boring. I am the Night Lich — Momon. The mightiest magic caster of them all! Look at you, so terrified you don't even dare to speak. Still, it can't be helped. I can understand why you'd be scared speechless after seeing all the magic items I have on me.”

But the Big Ball of Undeath remained still.

Was it some kind of guard? That would mean the opposition had gathered a great number of Zombies and ordered them to respond to any attacks in kind, in order to block up the entrance to a cave of some sort.

Or what if there was no enemy after all, just an item stuck in the middle of that ball?

In order to learn about his foe, it was a given that the opposition would react in some way. If the enemy did not react at all, then he would truly be out of options. Launching an attack to force information out of his opposition was a last resort, for when he had no other choice.

“Honestly... speaking of which, it looks like you need to be taught a lesson for not even greeting me. <Summon Undead 3rd>!”

Suzuki Satoru summoned a Skeleton Warrior.

Then, he ordered it to the base of the Big Ball of Undeath.

While it was plain to onlookers that he was wary of his opponent's actions, walking into the enemy's attack range was really quite scary. In addition, it would interfere with his future plans.

Still, it hasn't attacked yet... if the plan was to gather the corpses and then have them wash over any nearby enemies like a crashing wave, then distance shouldn't be a matter to it. Or is it really just an item in there?

If this was just a mountain of corpses, then it was not impossible for it to be a Necroswarm Giant. The problem was that he was pretty much certain that it was a Zombie horde. In that case, then it would be an undead creature unique to this world that Suzuki Satoru did not know about. Perhaps he should call it a Combi-Zombie for now.

Suzuki Satoru moved the Skeleton Warrior up to the side of the Big Ball of Undeath.

“...What the hell, so it was just a mass of Zombies gathered together. I can't believe I made such a mistake. To think I actually mistook a group of unintelligent undead for something strong.”

The Big Ball of Undeath wobbled. Then, as though breaking out of an egg, the Big Ball of Undeath slowly changed shape.

“Is that... a Dragon?”

It had a long neck, a reptilian-looking head, and wings. It had six thick legs and a slender, whiplike tail. It resembled a Western-style Dragon.

However, its neck was extremely long compared to the normal image of a Dragon. Also, the extreme thinness of its tail made it look like a mash-up of a Western and an Eastern Dragon. Or rather, it looked like someone had stuck six legs and a winged beast onto the body of a snake. Also, it looked ugly and lumpy, without any of the beauty a Dragon’s form ought to have, probably because it was made out of Zombies.

In addition, it was far too big.

It was 150 meters long from head to toe at the very least. Not even YGGDRASIL had something of that size.

Of course, Suzuki Satoru understood that this was a cosmetic change in the Big Ball of Undeath. In other words, it was made from 400,000 or more Zombies joined together. But when he thought about its length and width and the fact that he needed to crane his neck just to see its full size and so on, could a mere 400,000 Zombies be enough to make a gigantic body that was over 150m long? Surely it was not hollow—

“—I had originally intended to ignore you because you were being utterly foolish. But no matter. You have a big mouth for a mere middle-class undead being.”

The Dragon’s mouth slowly opened, and its bass voice echoed in all directions.

What he called a mouth was just something made of piled Zombies. Surely the voice’s owner must be someone else. But where had this powerful voice — which seemed like it was being spoken by all the Zombies at once — come from?

Is its true form in its mouth?

Its mouth was big enough to easily swallow Suzuki Satoru, so it would not have been strange if there was someone the size of Suzuki Satoru in its head.

One would not be able to discover someone like by remote observation. However,

Suzuki Satoru could not make out anything else about it.

The mouth was not just made up of humanoid Zombies — there were beast Zombies in there too.

So that was why they had not seen any animals on their way here. All the animals on this mountain must have been zombified and then driven to the Big Ball of Undeath. It would seem there were more than a mere 400,000 Zombies making up that Big Ball of Undeath — that Dragon Zombie.

Also, the opposition had let slip something more important than that.

From his opponent's reaction, it probably knew about Night Liches. In addition, it had not been able to tell that Suzuki Satoru was actually an Overlord.

In other words, Suzuki Satoru had made it past the first hurdle, but that did not make him careless.

...It might be a bluff. If it were me, I'd pretend that I was fooled even after seeing through my enemy's lies. Looks like I'll need to continue gathering information to see what other cards the opposition has up its sleeve...

Suzuki Satoru predicted and double-checked over and over again as he backed up one step.

“W-What are, what are you? Are you not a mere Necroswarm Giant...?”

The Dragon's face moved. Actually, it was the Zombies moving, but they were very well controlled.

If, for instance, the opposition could not just freely control the Zombies used for facial expressions, but all the Zombies — far in excess of 400,000 — that made up its body, then its undead control ability would be far beyond that of Suzuki Satoru's.

If that was the case, then that left another question.

Why had the enemy not tried to directly dominate Suzuki Satoru?

Was it because Suzuki Satoru was of a higher level than it could control? Or was there some kind of special condition required for domination, like say personally turning

the target into an undead creature?

Just as Suzuki Satoru was pondering this, the Dragon's expression changed. He did not know whether to say it was expressive, or if he should laud its control of Zombies, but it was plain to see that it was sneering at Suzuki Satoru.

"What? You do not know of me — you dare make a fool of me with that pitiful knowledge of yours? No, surely I am the fool for bothering with you."

"You've got a pretty big mouth, you Dragon-shaped Necroswarm Giant. You might have gained intelligence because you formed a big mass, but unfortunately you're too blind to see how much more powerful I am than you!"

The Dragon's face shifted again, and it opened its mouth.

"Fuhahahaha! To think you could entertain me so! I did not think mocking the ignorant could be so amusing. Fuhahaha—" The laughter suddenly stopped. "Oh miserable little undead, you — will you not be my jester? You need not do anything. Simply stand there and entertain me. While the position of Jester requires a certain degree of intelligence to fill, it seems there are born clowns in this world!"

"What, what's so funny! I'm an undead creature that's struck terror into the hearts of people all over!"

"Fuhahahaha!... Oh no no no, everything you say is just so amusing. Alright, now what do you want to do — I forgot your name, because I was planning to annihilate you... no matter, forget it. Night Lich. Will you serve as my jester? You do know I am willing to spare you if you agree, do you not?"

"...I don't want to be laughed at by an undead creature who doesn't even dare state his name."

The gigantic body moved.

"I see. While it feels foolish to give my name to an undead creature of your insignificant stature — I am Cure Elim, the XX Dragon Lord."

"What?"

"Ah, yes... indeed! I am — the Elder Coffin Dragon Lord!!"

“I see...”

So it was a Dragon Lord. In other words, it was in the same league as the Brightness Dragon Lord. Simply put, it was very strong.

A bolt of pain stabbed at Suzuki Satoru.

From now on, things would be disastrous if he made one false move.

And the problem now was — was Cure Elim in that thing? Or was it controlling the ball from afar?

“Surely one as impotent as yourself should know the nature of a Dragon Lord?”

“I can’t believe a mere pile of Zombies is calling itself a Dragon Lord. It looks like you’ve moved up in the world. Or does it mean Dragon Lords have fallen far? In any case, it’s rather unsightly for you to act like a big shot in front of a great and mighty undead being like myself, don’t you think?”

“Fuhahaha! What a marvellous jester you are! Truly, you are entertaining!” With that, the air around Cure Elim changed.

“Still — the undead really do displease me. Even when standing before me, even in the face of annihilation, you do not know fear.”

The Dragon’s right foreleg suddenly swelled up, and a vast quantity of Zombies extended forward like a rope. Then, they seized the Skeleton Warrior, dragging it before the Dragon’s foreleg.

The Skeleton Warrior tried to flee, but in the face of superior numbers, defeat was its only recourse.

The Skeleton Warrior was swallowed up by the Dragon’s foreleg and Suzuki Satoru could hear it being crushed to bits even from where he was standing. At the same time, he felt his link to the Skeleton Warrior break.

“—I see... you’re not bad.”

Suzuki Satoru cast *<Fly>* and retreated.

“Not bad?... Fuhahaha, you really are amusing. Truly, you are a born jester.”

“...Hmph. You think you’ve won just because you destroyed the lesser undead I summoned? <Fireball>!”

The third tier spell struck the Zombies in the shape of a Dragon Lord and flames erupted in all directions.

It was true that the burst of flames was tiny in comparison to the massive size of the Dragon. However, Suzuki Satoru narrowed his eyes and looked closely. That was because he saw the blasted Zombies crumble and fall.

After the fried Zombies fell away, they were replenished by undamaged Zombies from the interior.

“W-What’s this? Are there Zombies under there too!?”

“<Fireball>… that warped magic spread by that accursed lot. Not only are you pitiful, but infuriating... speaking of which, that should have been a low-grade spell. Night Lich, try a higher-tier spell on me... as it happens, I wish to assess the completion of this body.”

“W-Why you! How dare you use me for your experiments!”

If Suzuki Satoru had been alive, he would have been spluttering and frothing as he said that, but Cure Elim simply replied with mocking laughter.

“Indeed, that was my intention. Despite your vacuous skull, it seems you at least understand that much.”

“—I see. So you turned all the people in the city undead to protect yourself? Like armor made of Zombies, to protect your fragile body, then?”

“Perhaps.”

Maybe it was because Cure Elim regarded Suzuki Satoru as a being far weaker than itself that it was being so chatty. Or perhaps it had been looking for someone to talk to all this while.

“No, it was not for such a pedestrian reason. The souls of that city — no more than

that — have been used by myself.”

“Oh — and how did you do that? What’s your aim?”

“I have no reason to tell you.”

“...Surely you can tell me as a parting gift before I depart to the underworld?”

Am I obsessing about this? Suzuki Satoru thought. However, he probably would not be able to learn anything if they really began laying into each other. After considering Keno and the fact that his opponent was still willing to talk, he ought to learn as much as he could.

“Would you tell an inferior lifeform such a thing — tell the ants crawling around on the ground? Then you must be quite the generous soul. Ah, no, you born jester. Perhaps I revealed it long ago without realizing it.”

“—Tch. Hmph. If you call yourself a Dragon Lord, then I must be the Undead Lord. While I have hundreds of servants at my command, I shall make an exception and go one on one with you. You should be grateful.”

“Fuhahahaha! Indeed I am! Undead Lord! Fuhahahaha!”

“What’s so funny?”

“The fact that you do not realize why makes it all the more mirthful!”

The mood in the air changed. Suzuki Satoru had always been a commoner. Though he had experienced things like presences and killing intent over his five years of travel, the truth was that he did not quite understand them. Even so — he could sense the Dragon Lord’s fighting spirit.

However, it was not being serious.

“While I would have liked to take your spell head-on, I suppose it would not be good to go too easy on you, Undead Lord-sama. Perhaps I should essay an attack as well. Take care to avoid it so it does not destroy you, alright?”

Cure Elim made its move.

The movement was ponderously slow, but it closed the distance with incredible speed.

Suspicious, Suzuki Satoru immediately realized the source of this disconnect. The Zombies below Cure Elim's feet that were in contact with the ground were writhing as though on a set of tracks, driving its body forward after it took its first step.

If he was deceived by that movement, Cure Elim would be standing before him in an instant.

Suzuki Satoru narrowed his eyes.

Cure Elim was raising its right foreleg from far away, swinging it like it was going to perform a sweeping kick.

There was no way it could hit him from this distance. He had no idea why Cure Elim had done this, but Suzuki Satoru's instincts told him that there must be some trick to it, and he reflexively bent down to dodge it.

Just then, the right foreleg unfurled like a paper roll.

The massive forelimb formed of Zombies swept over Suzuki Satoru's head as he bent down so low he was practically prostrate.

The speed of the sweep was not very fast. Even Suzuki Satoru, whose abilities were comparable to a level thirty-odd warrior, could evade it. However, he did not know if it was because Cure Elim had purposely slowed his strike.

“Fuhahahaha! Well dodged! But you look quite unsightly!”

Suzuki Satoru realized the intention of Cure Elim's attack as he heard its roaring laughter. It was exulting in its superiority as it watched Suzuki Satoru go face down into the mud. Suzuki Satoru raised his head and shouted angrily.

“How dare you make me crawl on the ground!”

“Fuhahahaha!

After the sweep, the foreleg rolled back up like a snake, and its shadow fell on Suzuki Satoru. Perhaps it was because it was made of Zombies, but every intense movement seemed to ignore inertia. The Zombies in the joints made squelching and cracking

noises, as though they were being pulped by the forceful movements.

Suzuki Satoru desperately struggled to escape from Cure Elim's attack radius. He did not even have the time to cast *<Fly>*; all he could do was run on his two feet.

With a thud, the foreleg smashed into Suzuki Satoru's former location. There was a splatting sound as many Zombies were squashed flat.

He was not being serious yet.

That attack just now, made with limbs of Zombies that extended like rolls of paper could have hit him. There was only one reason why it had not done so.

This was a cat toying with a mouse.

“*<Lightning>*.”

Suzuki Satoru cast a spell at Cure Elim's forelimb, which was on the ground.

The bluish-white electrical stroke of the *<Lightning>* spell pierced through the massive, trunk-like limb.

However it had even less of an effect than that *<Fireball>* just now. Several Zombies fell, and then the Zombies inside flooded out from the inside as though they were being spat out.

The dead Zombies looks like they had been spat out. He did not know if Cure Elim was doing this or if it was happening automatically. However, considering one would need over 500,000 Zombies to make a body like this, it would probably be impossible to control each individual one, so it was probably the latter.

“Fuhahaaha!”

The limb moved again as Cure Elim laughed merrily.

“Nggh!”

The part of the forelimb that stood on the ground expanded and shot out in Suzuki Satoru's direction.

Ten-plus Zombies reached their hands out for him like they desired his body. The Zombies extended like they were tied together by ropes, with the Zombies at the back holding the bodies of the Zombies in front. In this way, they could extend for several meters without touching the ground.

This was the attack which had destroyed the Skeleton Warrior.

Suzuki Satoru dealt with it in a calm, unhurried fashion.

He pulled away with a <Fly> spell. The Zombies which had failed to grasp Suzuki Satoru slowly retracted into Cure Elim's leg.

They had pulled back quickly after seizing the Skeleton Warrior, but they were very slow now. Why was there a difference?

“What did you do!? I've never seen anyone use the undead like this before! How did you do it!?”

“An undead creature of your caliber would not understand, This is something which only I can do.”

“Why you! <Iceball>!”

While this was an area-effect spell of the same tier as <Fireball>, ice spells were essentially useless against the undead. And indeed, it had done nothing to the Zombies. Cure Elim did not even bother responding to it.

It was probably going easy on him. Then he would do as he pleased.

“<Acid Arrow>!”

He cast a second tier single-target spell

The struck Zombie fell.

“What's the matter, jester? You will need to cast that weak spell tens of thousands of times to kill me. You are a Night Lich, are you not? Cast a filthier spell of a higher tier at me. Or does this mean — you cannot?”

“Ngh!”

"Then I shall verify it."

Cure Elim attacked again. This time, he hit Suzuki Satoru.

It was a strike, as he had expected, but the damage it did was trivial for his present gear to absorb. However, the force of the attack was not cancelled out. Suzuki Satoru rolled several times along the ground before stopping.

Suzuki Satoru shakily rose to his feet.

"Is something the matter, jester? My experiment is not yet over, so take care not to die, will you?"

Cure Elim closed the distance to Suzuki Satoru in that nauseating way again. This time, it raised its left foreleg. Then, it repeated its huge area-effect attack from before.

Evading it was simple enough, but that was not the end of Cure Elim's attack.

The forelimb that had swept past him extended long, thick, tentacle-like objects. They opened their maws, latched onto Suzuki Satoru and entangled him.

Suzuki Satoru thought they were snakes, at first, but then he realised his mistakes.

—They're Dragons!!!

He could not escape the Dragon Zombie's gaping maw, and Suzuki Satoru was seized in its jaws from his right shoulder to his chest. The teeth sinking into his shoulderblades creaked as they damaged him. It might have been zombified, but it was still a Dragon.

While he knew of Beast Zombies, not knowing that even Dragons could become Zombies had been a very big mistake.

The strength of Zombies depended on the base creature they were made from. Surely a Dragon Zombie would be several, if not dozens of times more powerful than a Zombie made from a human. In addition, its increased HP meant that he might not be able to kill one with a single third tier spell.

While they were not especially mighty foes for Suzuki Satoru the existence of Dragon Zombies implied that there were more powerful monster Zombies in store. No, he

ought to say that they were definitely out there somewhere.

Suzuki Satoru suddenly had an idea.

It had not collected the people of Keno's country because it did not need to.

The 400,000 human-sized Zombies of Seruk-3 were enough. It had then turned more powerful creatures into Zombies and stored them in its body.

It was very likely — no, it was the only possibility.

“—To think you'd use your own kind!”

“Own kind? Fuhahaha! What a jester you are. How could I consider inferior living beings to be of the same kind as myself?”

Dragons grew more powerful the bigger they got. Was it saying this in light of that point? Or were Dragon Lords a different kind of creature altogether. Suzuki Satoru did not know about that. However, if it had zombified several Dragons, then part of his battle strategy would need to be altered.

Something picked up Suzuki Satoru's body.

The Dragon's body began to retract into Cure Elim's foreleg, bringing Suzuki Satoru with it.

Escaping was easy enough. It might have been a Dragon, but it was just a Zombie after all. Suzuki Satoru worked his hands into the gaps of the teeth seizing his shoulder and forcefully pulled them apart.

The Dragon's lower jaw opened. Suzuki Satoru's strength overcame the Dragon's might, which meant that this Dragon was not yet fully grown.

Just as he was thinking that he could slowly struggle free, a massive hand came into view.

“What!”

A hand that was several times the size of a normal human's seized Suzuki Satoru's body.

“Giants too!?”

The Giant’s body poked out from beside the Dragon and grabbed Suzuki Satoru. He could not tell what species of Giant it was, but it probably lived around here.

The rate at which he was being reeled in suddenly sped up, and Suzuki Satoru was drawn into Cure Elim’s foreleg.

The undead domination effect which he was most wary of did not take place. Of course, he had never once lowered his Turn Resistance III in order to protect against it. It would seem he would not be controlled just by being pulled into it.

In that case, it would seem the undead domination only happened to the Zombies raised by its own power.

The maw biting his shoulder and the Giant hand holding his body let go. In its place, an arm the size of Suzuki Satoru held and pinned him.

There were so many Zombies around him that he could not see the outside. However, he could feel himself moving like he was being carried by an underwater current. Or rather, it would be more accurate to say he was being propelled by the surrounding Zombies.

Just as he was wondering where he would be taken, his head was suddenly thrust outside.

What skillful control of the undead you have, Suzuki Satoru mused with genuine admiration for Cure Elim.

The outside — it looked to be around Cure Elim’s shoulder. It would seem he had been pulled up from below.

A head that was many times smaller than before looked down on Suzuki Satoru from above.

No, that was not it.

That could not possibly be something made out of Zombies.

That was Cure Elim’s true form. Wrapped by Zombies, Cure Elim had revealed its true

self.

Though he could only see its head, it looked very much like the head made of yuringigers. However, it was beautiful. Its vibrant scales rippled like they were alive. However, Suzuki Satoru could sense Cure Elim's main body — though he was surrounded by the undead — with his undead detection sense. The massive creature before him was also undead.

The blood-red, vertically-slitted red eyes looked straight at Suzuki Satoru.

As he saw those eyes, he suddenly thought of Keno — he hid his anxiety with all his might.

“—Aiiiiiiiieeeeeee!”

Suzuki Satoru screamed.

It was a hideous cry that one would naturally expect from those who understood that they could not win.

“Fuhahaha,” Cure Elim narrowed its eyes and twisted its neck. “What a pleasing scream. It would seem even the undead can make such sounds when they know their doom is at hand.”

“W-Wait! Dragon Lord. No, Dragon Lord-sama! I, I was wrong! Please accept my apology! You — you’re very strong, I know that now. I was wrong, so please forgive me!”

“Hmph! Only now, at the end, do you understand.”

“Ah! You’re the mightiest Dragon Lord! I was wrong!”

“—Is that so? In that case...”

Suzuki Satoru could imagine what the Dragon Lord would say next. That was why the Zombies holding on to his right arm were beginning to exert force on him. They — the Zombies — were probably using a lot of strength. Their muscles made a pulping sound as they were torn apart, and he could feel rotting fluids splashing onto his body. But no matter. He pretended that his left arm was stuck. At the same time, he took out his hidden item and prepared to use it at any time.

“Fulfill your duty as a jester to the very end. Allow me to enjoy the screams of a foolish undead creature as he is crushed flat!”

“Noooooooooo!”

The crushing sensation grew stronger, and Suzuki Satoru wailed in an uncharacteristic way. At the same time, he raised the crystal he was holding to a place where Cure Elim could see, and then released the spell within.

“<Greater Teleportation.>”

◊ ◊ ◊

He arrived at Seruk-3’s main gate, which he had memorized beforehand so he could teleport to it.

Suzuki swiftly passed through the gate and hid behind cover that Cure Elim could not see past from his current position. He pricked up his ears and observed his surroundings. The empty city was dead silent, and the mountains above were also quiet.

It would seem his escape had not driven Cure Elim into a rage, and there were no signs it had pursued him.

Was it because moving that huge body needed time, or did it not see the value in squashing a single bug? Suzuki Satoru continued observing for a while before concluding that it was the latter.

“And now...”

Suzuki Satoru’s expression suddenly changed. His pathetic demeanor from just now was gone, and in its place was a calm thoughtfulness, as though he was following up on the results of an experiment.

Suzuki Satoru deployed his anti-divination defensive spells. This way, he would be able to instantly sense if the opposition was trying to find him with magic.

Even so, it would seem the Wild Magic his foe could use was different from the spells that Suzuki Satoru could use. It was not impossible that it could pierce his defensive

spells. Therefore, it would be safer for him to act as though every move he made was being observed by his opposition.

Suzuki Satoru narrowed his eyes.

He had spent so much time on preparations precisely because he had considered this possibility.

As he analyzed the information gained from that battle, he looked over at Cure Elim's direction.

"You really are strong."

He had to admit that even the phrase "mighty foe" was not enough to describe it. One could say it was an extremely tough opponent.

The Brightness Dragon Lord was strong too, but Cure Elim was stronger still, and—

"How troublesome."

The most basic thing was that Cure Elim's original body was undead.

Suzuki Satoru — or rather, the character Momonga — had mastered various skills which fit his role as an undead magic caster. Now that he was fighting an unliving enemy like one of the undead, his options for effective resistance were extremely limited.

He could be certain that Cure Elim had surrounded himself with a mass of Zombies. While Zombies were the weakest kind of undead, defeating that many Zombies would need a great deal of time and mana. Worse still, it was not just human Zombies in there, but even Dragon Zombies. Even if he killed all those Zombies, a mana-depleted Suzuki Satoru would then have to face an untouched Cure Elim. It was an overwhelming disadvantage.

However, from the spells he had cast earlier, it would seem there were no special Zombies in there, and it would seem they could not breach Suzuki Satoru's High-Tier Physical Nullification. Therefore, he ought to be able to ignore the damage and focus on keeping enough mana to maintain that skill, letting them hit him as much as they wanted — but things were not that simple.

If one's armor was damaged, normally one would choose to retreat, repair one's armor, and then fight again. Thus they would choose to flee. Therefore, he felt that it would make sense for Cure Elim to escape, unless there were some special reason to make him stay there. However, there did not seem to be anything like that.

If it had some way to collect the Zombies from its surroundings, then while he was not sure exactly how many Zombies there were in the surrounding countries, their numbers would run into the eight digit range at the very least. If he let it escape, he might end up having to fight Cure Elim through tens of millions of Zombies.

When that happened, the same tactics would probably not be effective again.

The more times he fought, the more likely it was that Suzuki Satoru would lose.

He had managed to escape this time, but it would be best to assume that his High-Tier Physical Immunity would only be effective for the next battle.

Analyzing the knowledge one had gained and working to counteract the abilities of one's opponents was a matter of course. Cure Elim would definitely do such a thing. Only a fool would assume all their enemies were fools.

More to the point, the enemy might have found a countermeasure in the next battle, if he was unlucky. Since he was a Dragon Lord like the Brightness Dragon Lord, it was possible that he might wield Wild Magic — an incomprehensible power that did not exist in YGGDRASIL.

No — he ought to take that into consideration too.

You lose less by overestimating your opponent compared to underestimating them.

Also, if he let it flee, the worst-case scenario might play out — he would join forces with the Brightness Dragon Lord and attack Suzuki Satoru again.

It was very likely to be the case if it was as strong as Suzuki Satoru and he managed to strip away its Zombie armor.

When that happened, Suzuki Satoru would be out of luck.

In other words—

“I need to win the next battle and make sure I kill Cure Elim.”

He did not know if he could do it.

But he had to do it.

First, he had to destroy that layered armor of Zombies. Otherwise, he would not be able to strike at Cure Elim’s body. But it would be more dangerous the more time he spent on it. While he had no idea how far its Zombie-summoning ability could reach, Suzuki Satoru would have no chance once it managed to replenish its shield of Zombies.

In that case he would need to use an attack spell that could penetrate all the way into the interior and cover a wide area at the same time.

In that case, his options were—

“Super-tier magic.”

Suzuki Satoru thought about the most potent spells he knew. Could any of them destroy all those annoying Zombies around Cure Elim?

He thought of several options, but each of them lacked an element of decisiveness.

Also, even if he destroyed the Zombie conglomerate, the fact that he knew nothing about the abilities of Cure Elim’s true form meant that he would simply be engaging in a blind gamble.

Could the rewards of this battle, or rather, this victory, satisfy him?

As Suzuki’s thoughts wandered unbidden in that direction, he suddenly laughed.

“What am I thinking? Isn’t the reward of this greater than anything else? I’m doing this for Keno.”

Suzuki Satoru — or rather, the character Momonga — might have been the Guildmaster, but in truth, all he had been doing were miscellaneous tasks or making sure things went smoothly between everyone. He was not someone who stood at everyone’s head and pointed the way for them to go.

Therefore, there was a powerful sense of fulfilment in Suzuki Satoru's heart now.

It was because he was fighting on the frontlines for his friend.

He was the one making sacrifices for his friend's happiness.

"Cure Elim — you're going down today," Suzuki Satoru declared in a quiet, calm voice.

However, his words were filled with powerful emotion.

3

Suzuki Satoru began changing his gear. As he opened the ring section of his inventory, his eyes lingered on the Ring of Ainz Ooal Gown.

However, it was only for a moment.

He would be fighting today's battle personally, going to the frontlines as a guildmaster, so he needed to be certain of victory. If it did not aid him, then he needed to set it aside, even if it was the ring that symbolized the guild.

Without any hesitation, Suzuki Satoru exchanged his rings for ones which would be most effective during the coming battle with Cure Elim, according to his analysis.

He placed the ten rings in front of himself and used a cash item. After that, he put them on, one after the other.

With that, the rings registered to him were now these ten rings — the rings that would be most effective in the battle against Cure Elim. In fact, the cash item that he had just used was one that could change the rings registered to his fingers, and Suzuki Satoru only had two of them. Perhaps using such a precious item was a foolish decision, but dying because he had held it in reserve would be a total waste. Therefore, the most important thing was to prioritize his ability to win in the upcoming battle.

Finally, he put on a pair of leather gloves. It was not a magic item; he had put it on to hide the rings he was wearing.

It would seem Dragons had the ability to detect treasure.

While he did not know the level of this Dragon Lord or whether or not it still retained that ability, he would go all-out in order to raise his chances of victory. If his opponent was stronger than he was, then raising the odds against it by 1% or even 0.1% would be good.

After that, he adjusted his equipment loadout, selecting gear that was especially effective against the undead or Dragons.

Finally, he came to one of his trump cards for this battle — the Staff of Ainz Ooal Gown.

As he looked upon the staff on his hand, Ainz smiled from the bottom of his heart.

This was something beyond even his wildest dreams, being able to wield the Guild Weapon — which he had never used before — in a live battle. Surely his guildmates would not have thought of such a thing.

“You are the proof of our guild’s existence. Let’s go.”

As if in response to Suzuki Satoru’s words, black smoke overflowed from the staff, as though it were displaying its will.

Along the way, Suzuki Satoru thought of something — it was not entirely impossible, but the systems within the staff might have actually developed a sapience of its own after coming to this world.

“Take your pent-up resentment at having been sealed away for so long and pour it all out during this battle. Prove the invincibility of ‘Ainz Ooal Gown’ with me!”

He was talking to himself. There was no way anyone could have responded to him. Yet Suzuki Satoru felt a strange satisfaction.

Of course, that so-called invincibility was just big talk. They had suffered minor setbacks countless times in the past. It was not like they had not experienced things like going to PK others and getting PKed in turn. But the guild had never suffered a defeat that had been big enough to shake it. From that point of view, if they could get back up again, it was not a true defeat.

He returned the staff into his inventory and took out the World-Class Item he usually equipped and put it on. Now, he had the protection of the world.

If Cure Elim could use the same abilities as the Brightness Dragon Lord — namely, Wild Magic — then he would be powerless against it without this item.

That was the end of his preparations.

Suzuki Satoru looked toward the fortress he had created. Should he say something to Keno before beginning his battle against Cure Elim?

And then, Suzuki Satoru shook his head.

There was nothing to be said.

Nothing at all.

All that he had to do was win and safely return to her side.

The other matter was more important.

Suzuki Satoru sent a <Message>, and gave directions in conjunction with that item that could play the voices of his friends from the guild as it told the time.

After finishing this preparation work, he followed his previous route back into the mountains.

He could have greatly shortened his journey by casting <Fly> or a teleportation spell, but he did not do so. Part of it was because he wanted to match up with the time, let his mana regenerate and various other reasons, but it was also because Suzuki Satoru was still a little afraid.

In the past, he had fought under the assumption that he could escape, and he had set up many methods of escape for himself.

This time, however, he could not flee.

Unlike the game YGGDRASIL, this was a battle that concerned Suzuki Satoru's life.

"I've only fought the Brightness Dragon Lord once, I still haven't gotten used to this."

Suzuki Satoru stopped and looked at his bony white hands.

Was he imagining things, or were they trembling?

“...I’m scared.”

He had made up his mind once and for all just now, he had been determined to fight for a guild member, and yet he had ended up like this.

Suzuki Satoru could not help laughing at himself.

“Alright... <Breath Ward>.”

“<Fly>.”

“<Dragonbane>.”

“<Bless of Magic Caster>.”

“<Infinity Wall>.”

“<Life Essence>.”

“<Mana Essence>.”

“<Greater Full Potential>.”

“<Freedom>.”

“<See Through>.”

“<Paranormal Intuition>.”

“<Greater Resistance>.”

“<Mantle of Chaos>.”

“<Indomitability>.”

“<Sensor Boost>.”

“<Greater Luck>.”

“<Magic Boost>.”

“<Draconic Power>.”

“<Greater Hardening>.”

“<Heavenly Aura>.”

“<Absorption>.”

“<Venerate Up>.”

“<Resistance From Natural Weapons>.”

“<Greater Magic Shield>.”

He stacked layer after layer of buffs on himself.

His undead detection told him that Cure Elim had not moved during this time.

Suzuki Satoru felt a little uneasy. Had he underestimated the Dragon Lord?

Could this all be a trap? Had his opponent seen through all his actions beforehand and made preparations to definitely kill him? Had he just left the Big Ball of Undeath there and fled somewhere else long ago?

His uneasiness grew and grew. It was as though he was trying to give himself a reason to run away.

Suzuki Satoru could not help snorting in laughter.

He laughed at his weak self.

Suzuki Satoru fixed his eyes forward, raised his right foot, and took a step forward.

Then he did it again, with his left.

There was no stopping now.

Many reasons to flee appeared in his mind, but Suzuki Satoru ignored them all.

He was close to his objective.

And then — Suzuki Satoru, guildmaster of Ainz Ooal Gown, was face to face with Cure Elim.

“—Jester. I thought you had escaped, but here you are again? Have you come to swear your loyalty to me? But... that equipment.”

His first sentence made Suzuki Satoru narrow his eyes.

There was no need to speak to him. Getting the first spell in would be wiser. However, he could inflict spell damage at any time, but he ought to do what he could only do now. Of course, there was no telling if that would bear fruit. However, he had to give it a try, however faint the chance.

Suzuki Satoru shouted.

“—This time! Let us have a real battle! Until one of us dies! Bring it, Dragon Lord!”

“Fu-fuhahahaha!”

In contrast to Cure Elim, who was laughing merrily, Ainz took a stance as though to show off his crystal.

“Hmph, is that the source of your confidence? — I will not let you flee again!”

A thin, membranous substance expanded and seemed to cover the entire mountain. It was massive, and looked to have an area measured in kilometers.

While he did not know its official name, Suzuki Satoru knew its effects.

It was a teleportation-blocking barrier. It was the first Wild Magic spell that the Brightness Dragon Lord had used.

In other words — things had gone as he had anticipated.

However, it would be troublesome if it only looked the same, but was something else entirely.

Suzuki Satoru gave an order with a silent <Message>, and then shouted.

“What have you done!!!”

“Hmph, you said you wanted a battle to the death, did you not? Then we cannot have you fleeing like last time.”

Suzuki Satoru cast a spell through the crystal. It was an extremely wasteful way of using it, but it was a necessary action at this stage.

The spell he cast was a <Widen Magic Shark Cyclone>. Normally, one could not store enhanced spells inside a spell crystal, but Widen Magic was an exception.

A tornado 100 meters wide and 200 meters tall appeared. A black hurricane that churned up the land separated the two of them.

Cure Elim began to move.

His vision was blocked by the tornado, and he could not see Cure Elim. However, Suzuki Satoru’s undead-sensing ability picked up a massive undead reaction behind the tornado.

Before Cure Elim thought to break through the tornado — Suzuki Satoru charged in first.

He's not wary or trying to evade... which side is he on?

The shapes swimming through the wildly-blowing winds — as though they were swimming through the ocean — were six meter-long sharks, which were gnawing at the Zombies and chewing them to bits. However, it was insignificant compared to Cure Elim's massive body. Just entering the tornado had gotten rid of a few Zombies which made up its exterior, but that was all. There were countless Zombies on the surface of Cure's body alone. Given the massive size difference between both parties, Cure Elim planned to easily break through the tornado at the cost of a small number of Zombies.

The gigantic Cure Elim would probably regard this tornado spell as meaningless resistance. One could say that was why he had chosen the spell, but there was one thing he wanted to verify.

Suzuki Satoru began to think fast.

Why had Cure Elim chosen to charge through the tornado?

And when he found his answer, his response was, "I see."

He had wondered if that was the case while wearing the ring, but now it was all clear.

Dragons typically had excellent eyesight. Sometimes, they could tell what was happening even when a dust storm blocked their vision. Therefore, he did not actually need to charge into the tornado. All he had to do was deploy Zombies from his feet and attack from safety behind the tornado. Surely there was no reason for the arrogant Cure Elim to personally close the distance.

In that case, why had he chosen to break through?

The answer was because much like <Undeath Slave Sight>, he had to rely on the Zombies' eyesight when seeing through their eyes. Perhaps the Zombies that made up its eyes were magical beasts with exceptional powers of vision, but they had lost various abilities after becoming Zombies. Therefore, they had become Zombies whose vision was only slightly above average, and so Cure Elim — hidden within the Zombies — would not be able to see through the tornado.

Of course, he could not conclude that it was not seeing through the Zombies on its wings or its legs. But from Cure's movements — the way it moved its head to lock onto targets, it was more likely that it was using the Zombies in its head — specifically, in the eye region.

In that case, he had a move readied for it in advance.

Suzuki Satoru took the Guild Weapon from his inventory and hurled it out.

“—Go forth, Staff of Ainz Ooal Gown! Initiate automatic interception mode!”

The staff obeyed the order and began moving on its own.

At the same time, Suzuki Satoru used his ace in the hole.

It was a trump card that only a player with the job class of Eclipse could use.

The name of this trump card was “<The Goal of All Life Is Death>.”

A clock foretelling death appeared behind Suzuki Satoru, and then he cast a mighty spell on Cure Elim as the latter drew close, through the tornado.

As though it were another Suzuki Satoru, the staff selected the most appropriate spell.

The staff was socketed with seven divine-class gemstones, with the elemental alignments of Sun, Moon, Earth, Fire, Wind, Water, and Time, with the ability to use each of the spells sealed within each jewel.

It began with a spell from the Fire Gem.

It was the divine area-effect attack spell <Fire Storm>.

The magical blaze consumed Cure Elim's head. The undead making up its eyes were destroyed, and Zombies crawled out from within to take their place.

Of course, he had already anticipated this. All he needed was to blind Cure Elim for a moment.

At the same time, Cure Elim's legs slowed down by a hair, probably because it could not see. That was an unexpected bonus.

Suzuki Satoru and the staff moved out of Cure Elim's path — taking care not to get trampled as the latter charged over — and cast their spells.

A gigantic magic circle appeared around Suzuki Satoru.

This implied that he was casting a super-tier spell.

Suzuki Satoru used the cash item he had taken out, and truncated its casting time.

And then, what came forth was—

“<Tribute to the Black Bounty (Ia Shub-Niggurath)>!”

What seemed like a black breeze blew past him. And indeed, the tornado just now had been raising gusts, not this spell. However, both of them were fundamentally different. The dark breath had no physical effect, and at the same time it was not something that could be stopped by physical means.

The super-tier spell *<Ia Shub-Niggurath>* was not a particularly scary spell. The reason was that was because all it did was inflict an instant-death effect, and it was useless against the undead, golems, and other beings which had no life. While it was effective against living players and enemies, it was hard to imagine anyone on Suzuki Satoru's level not having immunity to instant death.

Indeed — it was a quaint little spell, which only had an instant-death effect. However, with the aid of the Eclipse class's skill, this spell suddenly transformed into a vicious, terrible magic.

The clock floating behind Suzuki Satoru's back beeped twelve-o'clock, and as the spell cast, its hands began moving.

Meanwhile Suzuki Satoru had already begun his preparations for the next step.

He would not give Cure Elim any time to strategize. This was the moment of truth. If he allowed Cure Elim to raise his defense by even a little, or if *<Ia Shub-Niggurath>* was disrupted, then it would spell defeat for Suzuki Satoru.

Certainly, he could have cast *<Time Stop>*. However, *<Time Stop>* had been ineffective against the Brightness Dragon Lord which he had fought before, which meant that it was very likely that it would also be useless against the Dragon Lord Cure Elim's

original body. However, it ought to be effective against the Zombies surrounding Cure Elim. If those Zombies had the same defensive strength as Cure Elim, then his first round of attack spells would have been ineffective, and he would not have been able to defeat so many Zombies.

In other words, they were not equipped with magic items.

Equipped magic items added their abilities to their wearers and had the same resistances as them. For instance, consider the necklace Suzuki Satoru had on, and if it were on the ground. While they both had the same durability, the one on the ground would be more easily destroyed.

In other words, given the present circumstances, Cure Elim's defenses did not apply to his Zombies. They were not equipment; more like dominated undead clinging to its body.

In other words, the Zombies were just Zombies. If he cast *<Time Stop>*, it ought to be effective against the Zombie mass even if it was not effective against Cure Elim himself. That would make them a prison for Cure Elim, who would be sealed inside them.

While he felt that it was an effective attack method, there was one thing about it which made him uneasy.

Namely, where had the Brightness Dragon Lord's time-stop resistance come from?

All of Suzuki Satoru's time-stop resistance came from his gear. However, the Brightness Dragon Lord did not look like the sort who used equipment. Did that mean it had innate resistance to it?

It would be fine if that was all. The question was whether said resistance could be applied to others, as though it were a defensive spell.

Of course, even if it could cast a spell like that, it would not be wasted if he could force his opponent to play a card. However, it would be troublesome if that ability worked against his trump card as well.

That was why Suzuki Satoru did not cast *<Time Stop>*.

Instead, he cast another spell.

His first objective was to buy time.

It would be bad if his opponent ignored everything and strengthened its defense, so he had to confuse his opponent. He did not think that his opponent, as one of the undead, would lose its cool, but if he could use a variety of attacks to make it forget about defending itself, all would be well.

At the same time, he dismissed <Shark Cyclone>. He did not know if his timing was perfect, but Suzuki Satoru discovered a dog Zombie which had been staying behind Cure Elim all this time. It was far behind it, at a distance where he would not have been able to see if not for the keen vision he had gained after becoming undead.

“<Armageddon - Evil>.”

Darkness gathered around Suzuki Satoru and formed a swirling vortex.

Then, a gurgling sound came from bubble-like objects around him, and demons were born from the abyss.

The first to appear were demons below level 10; there were a total of 128 of those Inferior Demons.

There was no other word he could use to describe them other than “deformed.” Their heads were swollen, their left arms were unnaturally thin, their massive right arms were made of several tentacles twined together, and their legs were of different lengths. They did not possess anything to tell their gender apart, and yellow pus oozed from countless small holes all over their bodies.

Their forms seemed to imply that they had been born solely to pollute the world.

These demons, made for destruction and slaughter, were not under Suzuki Satoru’s control. Instead, they attacked everything around them. Given the circumstances, the only one near them was Cure Elim, and so they attacked it.

And as the demonic horde began their attack—

“—You miserable little demons! Out of my way!”

Cure Elim’s roar brought a smile to Suzuki Satoru’s face.

That was it.

After abandoning the surface Zombies on its head, Cure Elim's body began moving again after regaining its eyesight, forming thick tentacles of Zombies. Over 20 tentacles shot out at the demons.

One could not defeat the demons by swatting them one by one. However, the tentacle Zombies grabbed and bound the demons, then dragged them into Cure Elim's body. It was very difficult for lesser demons to resist the strength of ten-odd Zombies.

The demons which were swallowed up were immobilized and brutalized, and soon they were reduced to vile dross and returned to the netherworld.

However, that was fine.

It was fine because it was like this.

One could say that it would be troublesome if he had taken a long time to beat them.

He had summoned them because they were very weak. Perhaps it might have been more troublesome if Cure Elim did not know they were demons and treated them as powerful foes. Having won his bet, Suzuki Satoru did not let a mocking smile show on his face.

The bubble-like objects around Suzuki Satoru formed into a vortex again, and now demons of around level 20 appeared — <Hell Scythes>.

These demons looked like a fusion between praying mantises, humans, and other creatures. Their gigantic scythes shone with a steely glint, and they were coated in poison.

There were 64 of these demons in all.

Much like the Inferior Demons from before, they spread their praying mantis-like wings and flew towards Cure Elim.

Perhaps he was starting to panic because of their numbers, but Cure Elim's body began to writhe. Then, tentacles formed of Dragons, Giants, and other mighty beings hurtled towards the Demons.

One of them extended towards Suzuki Satoru.

“<Wall of Skeleton>”

The wall that appeared clashed with the tentacle. It was incredibly fast and tremendously massive, but that alone made it a very powerful attack. One could say it was like a car driving straight at him.

The wall formed of countless bones could not resist that overwhelming destructive power and was destroyed. At the same time, chunks of flesh from the Zombies that made up the tentacle scattered in all directions as said tentacle broke through the wall.

“What!?”

“Too late. Time’s up.”

As Suzuki Satoru — who had been quietly counting down in his head — said that, the clock which foretold doom had finished a circuit, and both hands once more pointed to the sky.

In that moment — the world died.

The land became a desert. Even the air became a thing of death.

Zombies of all kinds — there were most definitely more than 400,000 of them, and quite possibly more than a million — rained down on the desertified land. Suzuki Satoru flew back, clearing a large gap between them.

The demons needed to breathe, and so that spell had caught them in it and killed them too. But that meant nothing to Suzuki Satoru. That was because Cure Elim’s true form was completely exposed at last.

That mass of undead creatures had truly been made in imitation of Cure Elim’s body. They looked very similar, but his true form looked very graceful in comparison. It was an undead Dragon, with a body like a feline predator, whose legs and neck were both very long.

At the same time, black bubbles appeared around him, and from them emerged demons of around level 30 or so, Rotting Demons. They were over two meters tall, with tarry black skin that resembled bubbling swamps. The bubbles rose to the

surface and burst, releasing a yellow mist. Despite being surrounded by these demons who were wreathed in rot-inducing gas, Suzuki Satoru was not affected, because he was undead.

There were 32 of them in all.

Suzuki Satoru shrugged.

“You’ve shrunk, Dragon Lord.”

“—So you were the filth of the Dragon Emperor. That spell... that powerful panoply... I would never forget it...”

Its voice echoed with heartfelt hatred. Suzuki Satoru remembered that the Brightness Dragon Lord had said something along those lines too, and kept his eyes trained in Cure Elim. Of course he did not forget to press the button on the bracelet which had his friend’s voice stored in it.

“Don’t you think it’s a bit too late to notice that now?”

“...Your jester act was truly magnificent. I was completely deceived by your charade.”

The black bubbles appeared again, and the demons which appeared this time were around level 40, Supplicants. They had female bodies with long hair and bluish-white skin, and that alone would not make one think that they were demons. However, their eyes, noses and mouths were all sewn up with thread, and their hands were also sewn together as though begging the gods for mercy. There were eight of them.

Cure Elim used his foreleg to sweep aside the Rotting Demons that flew at him, killing them in one blow.

The summoned demons charged at Cure Elim in unison, as though they had been waiting for that chance. However, Cure Elim trained its crimson eyes on Suzuki Satoru, entirely unmoved, as though it wanted to indicate that Suzuki Satoru was its only opponent. It lashed out with its forelimbs, wings, and tail, destroying the demons one after the other.

Cure Elim was completely unaffected by the Supplicants’ “sigh” or the Rotting Demons’ “rotting gas” special attacks. It was probably not just because it was undead, but also because it had resistances to them.

The demons changed over to attacking with magic, but due to the differences in their levels, the damage they did was insignificant.

As Suzuki Satoru watched all this, he remained as cautious as ever. Originally, Suzuki Satoru had placed Cure Elim in the same category as the Brightness Dragon Lord. It would be child's play for such a powerful being to wipe out demons like that. If Suzuki Satoru took a combination attack like that, even he would have taken great to disastrous levels of damage.

Of course, he had no intention of taking it.

More black bubbles spewed forth, and the demons which appeared were around level 50 — War Devils. They were demons who wore full plate armor and looked like warriors. They held bastard swords wreathed in black hellfire, and their black wings protruded through their armor. They actually looked pretty cool, and there were four of them.

Normally, the spell would summon two level 60ish demons and one more level demon of around level 70, but Suzuki Satoru cancelled that and instead chose to summon more lower-level demons instead. And so, there were twice as many level demons ranging from level 10 to 30.

This was when the spell's effects ended.

The War Devils used their skill, a commander-type buff which improved the abilities of all summoned demons. However, Cure Elim used its long tail to sweep back and forth, destroying the demons as they pulled away to cast spells. A minor stat buff meant nothing to a high-level Dragon.

Cure Elim seemed abnormally calm as it neatly exterminated the demons.

This isn't good, Suzuki Satoru thought. It would be better if it had continued underestimating him like just now.

“Now then, time for you to die. Your—”

“—Waitwaitwaitwait, are you really in such a rush? I'd like to ask you something, ah, what's that, die without regrets part, can't you even spare that little bit of kindness for me?”

“I have no mercy for your kind, you fools who pollute this world.”

Cure Elim coiled himself up with a *whoosh*.

Dragons resembled feline predators in some ways, such as their dextrous movements. Cure Elim’s stance must mean that it was planning to pounce on its prey — Suzuki Satoru.

It would seem it planned to ignore all the demons around it. Of course, that was not a mistake. If Suzuki Satoru were faced with beings that could harm it and beings that could not harm it, then it would be obvious which ones he would be wary of.

After deciding he could no longer buy time, Suzuki Satoru began goading Cure Elim. While his place was to make his opponent act without being able to calm down, he had the feeling that it would be ineffective, given that his adversary was undead.

“Fuhahaha, where has your smile gone? What happened to your laxity? Take your time—”

Cure Elim’s eyes narrowed in hate.

“—And savor your destruction, filth of the Dragon Emperor!”

And then, as though casting those words behind it, Cure Elim began to sprint, its feet crushing the Zombie corpses flat. Even so, they did not affect the speed at which he was closing in.

The War Devils which had flown between the two of them were struck by its charge and were knocked far away. While they had not been killed in one hit, their injuries were such that they were practically dead.

“Oi oi,” Suzuki Satoru smiled as Cure Elim closed in. “I’m not done attacking yet.”

A black orb floated in the air.

It fell to the ground, as though waiting for Suzuki Satoru to speak.

This sudden development led Cure Elim to spring far, far away, keeping its distance from Suzuki Satoru. How had it managed to cancel its previous velocity and suddenly retreat, as if in defiance of inertia?

The fallen black orb ruptured like a bag of water hitting the ground, or like a ripe fruit splitting open. Its contents spilled out, a black, tarry substance that did not reflect the light at all, a sticky black fluid that looked like it would dye anything it touched jet black.

It swallowed all the Zombies.

The black mud-like substance soaked his feet, but Suzuki Satoru was not afraid.

He kept an eye on Cure Elim, who was busy destroying demons. Suzuki Satoru made no attempt to attack and seemed utterly at ease.

A tree grew between the two of them.

There was one at first, and then their number went up. Two, three, five, ten... they were tentacles, waving despite the lack of wind.

“MEEEEEEEEEHHHHHHHHHHH!!”

Suddenly, he heard the adorable bleating of a goat. And it was not just one of them — it made one think that there would be a whole horde of them.

As though pulled by that sound, the tarry liquid emitted a hollow moan, and then something seemed to emerge from it.

Those beings were abnormal, far too abnormal.

They were roughly 10 meters tall, but there was no telling how much that number would be if he included their tentacles.

They looked like turnips, but with countless black tentacles in place of their leaves. Their thick roots resembled lumps of flesh, and below them were five legs, like those of black goats.

The root portion — that is, the lumpy section — was fissured and split open, in more than one place.

Even Cure Elim simply watched the proceedings warily. It did not seem to have any intention of attacking.

That reminded Suzuki Satory of the Dragon Lord he had fought before.

Ahhh, so that's it. These guys... they've never fought beings on their level before, or at least, not often.

Sensing an opportunity, Suzuki Satoru smiled, and then—

“MEEEEEEEEEHHHHHHHHHHH!!”

—The adorable bleating of goats came from those fissures.

They were maws that oozed sticky drool.

The five fearsome monsters which had appeared were called the “Dark Young.”

They were monsters that appeared in numbers proportionate to the victims of the spell <Ia Shub- Niggurath>.

While they did not have any potent special abilities, they had exceptional defensive power, and they were over level 90.

“Hoho, this is a high score... Cure Elim, it seems the people you sacrificed for your stupid plan all long for your death!”

That was impossible. The dead could no longer have wills of their own.

However, that might be possible in this world. The idea that the Dark Young had taken the last wishes of the dead onto themselves refused to leave Suzuki Satoru’s head.

Their tentacles were extremely long, and they seemed eager for Suzuki Satoru to give an order. Perhaps that was the case.

“—Alright, go!”

The Dark Young bleated and charged at Cure Elim.

Cure Elim’s tail struck a Dark Young dead center and gouged out part of its body, and its tarry blood spewed forth. However, it trembled for only a moment, and then its thick legs trod the ground firmly, with hardly any decrease in its forward momentum.

“What!?”

Perhaps it had thought the Dark Young would have been sent flying, or that it would disappear like the other demons. The Dark Young closed in on Cure Elim as it spoke in a confused voice, and they collided.

It was Cure Elim who was knocked back.

The Dark Young surrounded it and made their move, striking Cure Elim countless times with their tentacles, some of them even moving up to bite it.

“Don’t look down on me!”

Surrounded by the Dark Young, Cure Elim twisted and dodged like a cat, using its wings, tail, legs and fangs to counterattack.

Just then, Suzuki Satoru cast a spell on him. He no longer needed to pretend that he was too arrogant to cast spells. Now, he would seal off his opponent’s choices and lead him onto the path he had prepared.

The spell Suzuki Satoru had cast was <Lopsided Duel>.

It was a third tier spell. It bound the caster to the target such that whenever the target tried to flee by teleportation, both caster and target would appear in the same place.

It could even ignore the target’s use of <Delay Teleportation> and teleport both of them to the designated location. However, this spell had a fatal flaw. If the target teleported among its friends, then the caster would be brought to the same place thanks to the binding, whereupon he would be surrounded.

That was why such a seemingly-useful spell was found in the third tier. Before it was patched, one could cast it on a teammate and piggyback off their teleportation, but after the patch it could only be cast on enemies.

Of course, if Cure Elim decided to teleport to the Brightness Dragon Lord or a similarly potent Dragon Lord, immediate escape would be his top priority. As the name <Lopsided Duel> implied, this spell had the advantage that if the caster teleported away, his opponent would not be teleported with him, which made fleeing easy.

Next, the guild staff also cast a spell.

It was the eighth tier spell <Dimensional Lock>.

While demons, angels, and other outsiders often used this ability as a skill, this spell had the same function. This spell prevented instantaneous movement through means such as teleportation outside its area, but it did not hamper physical movement. In order to avoid this, he had to keep an eye on every move that Cure Elim made.

Cure Elim was within the area of the <Dimensional Lock>. If it tried to escape the area and teleport away, <lopsided Duel> would take effect.

Suzuki Satoru and the guild staff had constructed a magical prison. The Dark Young served as a physical prison.

It would seem the Dark Young found the demons attacking them bothersome.

While they had been summoned by the same caster, the demons summoned through <Armageddon - Evil> were valid targets for attack. However that was the reason why summoned monsters could coexist.

Since he could not give orders to the demons, who were not under his control, he had no choice but to instruct the Dark Young to bear with it.

Suzuki Satoru ordered the Dark Young to “bear with it because the demons can’t do you much harm even if you don’t defend against them,” and then cast a spell.

“<Triplet Maximize Magic Reality Slash>.”

The attack spell of the highest order ripped into Cure Elim’s body.

This was probably the most amount of damage it had taken in all its battles to date, and Cure Elim’s eyes looked like they were trying to burn through Suzuki Satoru.

The guild staff cast the spell imbued within the Sun Gem — <Shining Blast>.

This was an area-effect attack spell, which did extra damage to evil creatures and the undead, with more damage the lower their karma value was. In turn, as their targets’ karma increased, it would do less or no damage to them.

Of course, the Dark Young would also be harmed, being that Cure Elim was in their midst. However, the karma value of the Dark Young was 0, despite their appearances,

so they did not take much damage.

However, the demons which had taken damage from the area effect began to consider the guild staff as an enemy. That said, since the staff was considered part of their summoners' equipment and the demons were bound by the sole rule of "do not attack your summoner," they did not attack it.

The way the demons redoubled the intensity of their attack on Cure Elim and the Dark Young might make one think that they were venting their frustration.

"Ohhhhhh! Damn you! Damn you, you filtttthhhh!"

Cure Elim's voice sounded strained. It was in check now. A minor level difference meant nothing as the last piece fell into place.

However, it would be a different matter if Cure Elim had been a certain other individual that Suzuki Satoru knew. It was precisely because Suzuki Satoru knew that tank, a monster who could make their attackers wonder exactly how they had been damaged, that he did not ease up.

"<Triplet Maximize Magic Reality Slash>."

He kept casting the most powerful attack spell he knew because he was determined not to give the enemy time to catch its breath and to defeat it here. At the same time, the guild staff cast a spell.

"<Summon Primal Fire Elemental>."

The flames that spiralled into the sky reached a full six meters in height and then slowly condensed into a humanoid shape.

This was the best move he could make, by further solidifying his advantage.

While Suzuki Satoru had wanted to do such a thing himself, he could not do so, much to his regret.

The summoned Primal Fire Elemental worked its way between the Dark Young and punched Cure Elim with flaming fists.

"<Triplet Maximize Magic Reality Slash>."

The guild staff cast the ninth tier divine spell <Crack In The Ground>.

Just as Cure Elim was wounded by the <Reality Slash>, the ground split open and a fissure gripped Cure Elim's leg, leaving him stuck there like an animal in a bear trap.

The instant-death effect had not activated, as he had expected. However, the damage over time and movement impediment effects should have applied.

While he did not know how fissures could form on a desert, such was the effect of the spell.

I've won, no—

Suzuki Satoru immediately tensed up in the moment he felt himself relax.

It was true that Cure Elim ought to be out of options given the present circumstances. Even Touch Me would not — probably — be able to break out of this. But it would be a different matter if Cure Elim still had a trump card in store. It was much like the battle with the Brightness Dragon Lord — Dragon Lords of that level had a super move in the form of Wild Magic. He could not lower his guard yet.

As the guild staff cast its attack spells, Suzuki Satoru observed Cure Elim's rear, its right, above it, and then put a bracelet on. How well would his own ace in the hole be able to adapt to the circumstances, and what kind of play would his opponent make? This ought to be the moment that determined victory and defeat.

...Keno... I'll safely return to your side...

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Why, Cure Elim thought amidst the chaos.

Why had he been driven to such desperate circumstances despite his immaculate planning? The Dragon Emperor's filth — why had he, the most self-sacrificing of the six Dragons that had prepared to annihilate the masterminds who had polluted this world, been forced into a situation like this?

The answer was very simple.

Cure Elim knew that foes of its level existed, but it had never fought them.

In the past, it had avoided entities on the same level as Suzuki Satoru. That was not because it was weak, but because its intelligence had told it that they could not be beaten.

It was because it had been so intelligent that Cure Elim had lost the chance to understand and learn. The importance of prior preparation. The right way of using power. The importance of swallowing one's pride and working with others. It had not understood any of that.

Suzuki Satoru and Cure Elim.

Those were the differences between these two mighty beings.

While it had been a game, Suzuki Satoru had accumulated vast amounts of experience in battles with his equals, and he understood the importance of fighting with his friends. In turn, Cure Elim knew nothing about these.

If Cure Elim had some relevant experience, it would not have been reduced to this state. It might have been able to kill Suzuki Satoru.

But — it did not.

Therefore, it was only natural that Suzuki Satoru — who had analyzed his foe's abilities and made preparations to guarantee his victory — should be able to triumph.

However, that was only in theory. One could not simply conclude that in reality.

There was also the difference in their individual power.

It was just like how an ant could not hope to bother an elephant, no matter how hard it prepared. A difference in individual power could become the ultimate obstacle. Dragons were still the mightiest species even after becoming undead, because their basic abilities far exceeded those of Suzuki Satoru.

And True Dragon Lords all possessed a certain mighty power. In Cure Elim's case, he had been honing that power, preparing to deal with Players.

That was the reason Cure Elim had made himself this way.

Wild Magic.

The Wild Magic that Cure Elim could use was considered the most vicious of all the spells that the Dragon Lords could cast.

Naturally, it required a massive price to be paid.

But as Cure Elim sensed that it would be destroyed if this kept up, it cast the spell.

Cure Elim's opened its mouth.

It was not in the way that a serpent would swallow its prey. Its mouth gradually split open, until the fissure reached its long neck. The split portion hung down, as though to make a gigantic maw several dozen meters wide in order to devour everything.

And then, it spewed forth from that massive mouth.

"Soulbreaker Breath".

It was a Wild Magic spell considered to be on par with the World-Class item Longinus. It was an irresistible power that would disorporate the soul of anything it touched.

This utterly malignant power consumed everything present.

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Keno's eyes went wide as she looked at the black orb floating over the mountain.

She could tell that it was huge, even from a great distance.

What was that? What on earth had happened? Question after question piled on top of each other, but in the end, the most important one was "What kind of power could have created something that frightening?"

Was it a secret technique wielded by Suzuki Satoru, her travelling companion? Or was it the power of the mysterious person who had taken Keno's country, Keno's family, Keno's everything away from her?

Regardless of what it was, this was not something that Keno's own power could hope to achieve. This was the nigh-miraculous power wielded by those faraway individuals who stood upon the apex of the world.

It would be good if that was Suzuki Satoru's power. No — it was not good.

It would mean that Suzuki Satoru, who could casually crush any foe he encountered — apart from the Brightness Dragon Lord — had encountered someone who warranted the use of that power.

In other words, Suzuki Satoru's opponent was as strong as he was.

Suzuki Satoru's might was beyond question.

He was the person she had spent the most time with other than her family, and Keno had learned that much about him over the course of five years of travel.

He had many flaws.

He had terrible taste in naming. He laughed at the strangest things. He treated the living badly. He made up incredible stories at the drop of a hat. He would gladly sacrifice the lives of others for himself — and for Keno. He was a very cruel person.

Even so, he had many virtues.

He was very polite to everyone. He was very curious. He always looked forward to the unknown and things he had encountered for the first time with a sparkle in his eye. At some point, he had learned how to properly comb out her hair. He treated her as an equal, even though she was weak and could only hold him back. And most importantly — he was very kind.

Keno hugged her flat, childlike chest, which would never grow.

He was a man who could protect her while fighting against an incredible monster like the Brightness Dragon Lord, and who had managed to retreat safely from it in the end. Surely he would be able to return safely to her side as well, right?

Even if she believed it — no, even if she *wanted* to believe it — she could not help but feel uneasy after seeing such great power.

“You'll come back, right? You'll return safely to me, right?”

He was the one who had saved her, after she had lost everything.

He was the one that she believed would continue saving her.

Keno Fasris Invern had gained eternal life. As a being detested by the living, even if she made living friends, they would eventually die before her.

And then, when she was like this, that night had come.

Being able to meet him in the city was great good fortune.

He would walk with her towards eternity. He would never let her feel the loneliness of being abandoned in this world. Her meeting with him was destined by fate.

“...”

But now, he was not by her side, and he might abandon her at any moment and flee. This uneasiness tormented Keno.

He had gone out there for her. Keno knew that very well, and she was very grateful for it.

“Do your best, Satoru...”

Keno prayed.

She had once believed in the gods, but after becoming undead, the gods in her heart had died as well. She understood one thing, which was that no matter what prayers one might have, the gods would not answer them.

Therefore, her prayer was directed to one person only.

The only person who had eased her pain.

Her prayer was to Suzuki Satoru alone.

Please return safely to me.

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He could see something black in Cure Elim's mouth — something that sent a shiver down the spine of even an undead being like Suzuki Satoru. It was something so overwhelming that his biological instincts — though he was undead — were responding to it.

It was too dangerous, too dreadful.

Faced with this breath that far eclipsed his own power, Suzuki Satoru lost his cool and shouted, “Dark Young, block—”

There was nothing wrong with that order. However, it had come too late.

Cure Elim expelled something that looked like a massively thick beam of light.

That beam consumed everything.

In just a moment — no, perhaps it was because he was linked to the Dark Young — Suzuki Satoru could feel the Dark Young being annihilated, right before the beam touched himself. That level 90- plus meat shield, whose defensive strength was higher than Suzuki Satoru’s own, had been obliterated.

It was probably not some kind of instant-death effect, since the Dark Young resisted that.

Then what was it — Suzuki Satoru thought of the trump card he had just used. Was it something like that?

But the black beam that Cure Elim had released did not have the weaknesses of his own move.

Was it an improved version of his skill?

The black beam whipped around wildly with the twisting of Cure Elim’s long neck and destroyed another Dark Young. The Primal Fire Elemental was also unable to resist the instant eradication. Then it was the third and fourth Dark Young, along with the demons. And then — Suzuki Satoru remembered a video clip. It was a video made when a player who had been about to retire had attached an item to an important NPC. Amidst the storm of curses like “God dammit!” “Fucking hell!” “Son of a bitch!” and so on which had filled the video—

It was—

“Long— <Wall of Skeleton>!”

At the same time, the staff cast <Veil of Moon>.

Both defenses deployed before him at the same time. It was a double-layered defense, composed of a physical barrier and an immaterial magical barrier.

However, part of his mind was coolly contemplating the fact that defensive barriers were useless against a World-Class Item like Longinus.

In fact, the black beam had easily pierced the barriers — as though they were not there — and swallowed up everything.

The beam of darkness racing out at him had no obvious destructive power — or pressure — to it.

Yet, it was a fatal blow.

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With all the interfering nuisances destroyed, Cure Elim pulled its leg out of the fissure.

Although it hurt a little when it raised its leg, that did not matter. Perhaps if it were alive, not taking care of the wound might have inflicted a reduction in movement speed due to a damaged limb, but such a negative status effect meant nothing to the undead.

In addition, pain held no fear for the undead.

This was one of the three reasons why Cure Elim — who had once been a coward — had chosen to become undead.

Cure Elim glared hatefully in front of itself with its crimson eyes — at the world that had been transformed into a desert that was utterly set apart from the living, and within it, a wall of bones and a shimmering, multicolored wall which looked like a curtain of thin cloth.

Its keen draconic senses spoke to it.

The one who had polluted the world was still there. As though they were waiting for Cure Elim to realize that, the two walls vanished as though they had melted away into the air.

The magic caster who had driven Cure Elim to its wit's end stood calmly in front of it. Beside it was a floating staff.

While it had no reason to doubt its own senses, its opposition had not been hurt in any way.

Walls like those could not stop the Soulbreaker Breath. That being the case, how had its opponent done this?

Perhaps he had teleported out of its range while Cure Elim's line of sight had been obscured. The World-Warping Barrier it had opened with simply interfered with teleportation through it. Teleportation was possible as long as the start and end points were both inside the barrier. He could have simply teleported to the edge of the barrier and then walked right through the barrier itself.

In that case, had he evaded the beam in that way? The answer was — no.

It was impossible to avoid it that way. In that case, there was only one other way to stop that attack.

“Wild Magic...”

Cure Elim's face twisted in utter hatred. The fact that it was undead was the only reason it could control its powerful emotions. However, the raging passions inside it could not accept that fact. It flared up, calmed down, and then flared up over and over again.

“Destroy, you. Filth. Not even your bones will remain—”

Just then, its enemy extended a hand. He was probably trying to say “wait, hold on.”

“—Cure Elim. My name is Suzuki Satoru.”

What else was there to say at this point? Cure Elim's face knotted up.

There was no point in knowing such a thing. Or was he trying to award it the name of the opponent it had destroyed, as a sort of trophy?”

That only displeased it more.

If its opponent had been an equal, then the name would have been worth remembering. However, simply keeping the names — even a fragment — of those excrescences in its mind made it want to throw up

“Would you call every single piece of filth in your way by name? You world-polluting fiiiiilllttthhh!”

Its anger became a mighty roar. The explosion of wrath seemed to shake the very earth.

However, its foe simply shrugged. Such composure made Cure Elim all the more wary of him.

Its opponent was unhurt, while its own stamina was greatly depleted. Was that why he could be so calm? Or was he laying some sort of trap?

“—Shall we make a deal now?”

Cure Elim was taken aback by those words. For a moment, he could not parse their meaning.

“...What. Are. You. Saying!? We've come all this way and you still!?”

“My aim was not to destroy you. Actually, I simply came here to investigate what was going on here, if there was a way to dispel your undead-conversion spell. Do you know? The surrounding countries have promised a huge reward for it, you know?”

It could not be sure if this was the truth. However, it was possible that those contaminated rabble were trying to do something about the result of Cure Elim's magic.

However, that only made Cure Elim even angrier.

Challenging it for such an utterly pointless motive as money was incredibly infuriating.

Cure Elim glared silently at its enemy.

Several seconds, no, almost a minute had gone by. Its opponent had probably sensed that Cure Elim did not want to speak, and so it continued talking.

“Money is very important, and it would be wonderful if I could obtain it without having to kill you... because exterminating you would be a source of additional income. In other words, I'd like to get paid twice for the same job... ah, yes, I have another question. All the Dragons I know amass larger hoards of treasure as they get stronger.

Does the same thing apply to you too? If I kill you, that means I'll be able to lay my hands on a huge pile of—”

Suddenly, several spells exploded against Cure Elim's body.

They were high-tier force-element attack spells.

They easily pierced the barrier protecting its body and dealt significant damage. This was a group of fairly high-tier magic casters.

Cure Elim hurriedly twisted its neck, looking for the source of the spells — behind it.

There were several undead creatures there. Its draconic senses told it that the staves of those undead contained great power.

And dangling from the necks of those undead was — Cure Elim turned to stare at its enemy.

“Didn't we agree that it would be one-on-one!?”

Demons, those black monsters, and that staff. Cure Elim had nothing to say about those. Anything you could summon by your own power was part of your own strength. After all, Cure Elim had amassed 1,200,000 Zombies. However, this was different. Bringing backup was not covered under a one-on-one battle. Surely anyone would feel like Cure Elim did, no matter how they tried to look at it.

However, its enemy shrugged lightly and nonchalantly replied, “Hah? We're trying to kill each other, aren't we? Why do I have to obey such a rule? Anything goes as long as you win. As long as you win.”

Its mind went white for a moment—

“You bastaaaaaaaaaaarrd!”

Cure Elim broke into a sprint. But it was not headed for its enemy. Rather, it was headed behind, at the undead who had cast spells at its back.

It was easy to tell who was easier to eliminate. Reducing the number of distractions was essential.

“You despicable scum!”

That dialogue had only been intended to buy time for his reinforcements to show up.

Falling into a trap like that and binding itself with the rules of the word “one-on-one” was truly foolish. No, not expecting his opponent to fight dirty like that was a disgrace.

As expected of filth.

And for believing a bald-faced lie coming from filth like that, Cure Elim had truly been a fool.

Though it was undead, it held on to its rage, and Cure Elim rushed at the band of undead with what was probably its greatest speed to date.

Several high-tier spells flew at it from straight ahead, wearing down at Cure Elim’s health.

And then behind it was the high-tier magic of the Dragon Emperor’s filth. It was a vile spell, with overwhelming power that could rip its body asunder with three invisible slashes. However, it understood that the spells from the undead band would destroy it before it could annihilate the first enemy, so it had no choice but to ignore the spell.

Its draconic senses told it that a great wind was blowing. That wind gusted up to the sky.

It shifted its line of sight and saw a mighty Wind Elemental, on par with the Fire Elemental from just now. Its opponent was probably trying to gain control of the airspace and suppress Cure Elim.

Suddenly, the word “retreat” flashed through Cure Elim’s mind. However, it was immediately forgotten as it saw the group of undead before it waving their staves.

“Get out of my sight, fangs of the filth!”

Unlike that filth, these undead were not as powerful. Still, it would use Wild Magic to augment its tail’s destructive power, just in case.

After sweeping away these nuisances, it would take care of that enemy. When the time came, Cure Elim would use that magic on its claws and fangs, and finish things in close

combat to prevent him from fleeing. It would seize with its claws and pin it to the ground, then crunch him to pieces with its fangs.

Perhaps it ought to widen its World-Separating Wall to prevent enemy reinforcements from further intervening. But that would drain a great deal of power, and so it would prefer not to use it. However, it might have no choice, depending on the circumstances.

It reached the filth's lackeys, and then used its long tail to sweep all of them with wind-parting force.

"What!"

Cure Elim was shocked. Something had been destroyed when its tailed had swept through the filth. However, nearly half of the undead seemed intact.

Cure Elim did not consider its tail swipes to be the mightiest of its kind. It would probably be nothing much compared to the Swordmaster Dragon Lord. However, it was impossible for them to be unhurt.

Had they completely defended against it somehow? Or — could it be, those undead were as powerful as the Dragon Emperor's filth?

The latter was impossible. If that was the case, he should have thrown them into the fray from the beginning. If not, then what other reason could there be?

Spells flew from the remaining undead and pared away at Cure Elim's strength. The enemy approaching from behind also cast two spells at it. The Air Elemental did not seem to have descended.

What should it do?

How could it turn this situation around?

Cure Elim thought.

In the end, it came to the two options of "fight" or "flight."

One Cure Elim said that it ought to flee. Cure Elim barely had any vitality left. Under these circumstances, it would be very difficult to defeat that intact opponent. Now was the time to retreat for the time being and readjust itself before fighting again.

But the other Cure Elim said this: Are you going to run again? After depleting your collected souls and using Wild Magic and having nothing to show for it? Will you let it end like this?

That's right!

Cure Elim had already bade its weak self farewell.

It was no longer its old self.

It swore to annihilate the filth of the Dragon Emperor, here and now.

Having made up its mind, Cure Elim used its most powerful attack

While it had been ineffective against its most hated enemy, there was no way it would not work against the undead before it.

Therefore—

Cure Elim fired the huge black beam from its mouth.

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Suzuki Satoru verified that as he used <Fly> to close the distance

The members of “Corpus of the Abyss” who had been forced into the battle had been annihilated. Even the Primal Air Elemental that was airborne to ward against Cure Elim taking flight had met the same fate.

Naturally, Suzuki Satoru had been attacked as well. However, it had no effect on him because of the protection of his World-Class Item.

If this were in the game, Suzuki Satoru would have screamed “you shitty devs” at the idea that such a broken attack could be used twice in rapid succession. However, in a live battle, he had no choice but to accept it.

Suzuki Satoru breathed a sigh of relief.

The fact that his opponent had chosen to stand and fight instead of fleeing made him happier than being able to nullify that attack.

Of course, that was why he had chosen to provoke his enemy. However, taking the special qualities of the undead into consideration, it was very likely that it might have chosen to flee once the situation proved untenable. Suzuki Satoru would have run if things had turned disadvantageous. His opposition had no reason not to do so either. Therefore, he had been very lucky.

However, it was strange that his opponent had not called for its friends. If one could not win alone, then surely one would choose to attack in a group.

Suzuki Satoru mentally tilted his head in puzzlement.

Was that because of pride or something?

If that were the case, then it would truly be laughable.

The arrogance of the strong was delicious to the weak.

The members of “Corpus of the Abyss” vanished, and Cure Elim’s ray stopped.

Suzuki Satoru gave them his sincere thanks. Cure Elim turned, and then it spoke — in a voice that was surprisingly calm, but which was laced with undertones of a blazing inferno.

“One more time, I can only use this one more time.”

It was a lie.

Suzuki Satoru scoffed at Cure Elim’s words. Where could one find an enemy who would reveal their weaknesses?

“This day — all my efforts up to this day! To think! To think!”

There was no need to reply. His response to Cure Elim’s cry was an attack spell. In truth, the staff had already indicated that Suzuki Satoru should “fuck this bitch up.” However Suzuki Satoru could not help answering Cure Elim.

“—You ruined my friend’s life and plunged her into an abyss of misfortune! Your life’s work deserves to end in nothing, you son of a bitch!”

There was no more need for words.

“<Triplet Maximize Magic Reality Slash> —”

“— <Triplet Magic Wall of Skeleton>.”

Suzuki Satoru's eyes went wide.

A wall of bones suddenly appeared in front of Cure Elim, intercepting the <Reality Slash>.

Behind the wall of bones that had been rent by the <Reality Slash> was Cure Elim, whose torso was coiled in preparation to lunge.

It had never used tier-based spells until now. Did it still have the strength to fight?

Suzuki Satoru began to panic.

His opponent's health was almost gone, but its mana was still full.

He sensed the staff asking him “Can we smack him down now?” and responded with “Wait a bit.”

“<Triplet Magic Undying Flame>.”

As that fifth tier spell took effect, Cure Elim's hooked claws and fangs blazed with bluish-white flame. This was a spell that added negative energy and fire damage.

He had finished all the experiments he had planned over the past five years. However, it looked like it had been patched. The bug that caused undead targets struck by it to gain infinite healing was no more.

In that case, it was probably just planning to add fire damage to its natural attacks. That would make it an even lower-tier spell.

—Is it in some kind of mode where it can only use spells of the necromantic specialization?

He theorized that this was the case, but he lacked the information to draw a conclusion.

Suzuki Satoru had not prepared any spells specifically to deal with Cure Elim. Instead, he ordered the staff: “Go.”

The spell it cast was called “Summon Primal Water Elemental.”

The water erupting from the ground took on a massive humanoid shape. At the same time, Cure Elim charged without hesitation. Upon seeing this, Suzuki Satoru could not help but feel relieved.

His opponent was clearly trying to achieve victory in close combat — because it did not want to get drawn into a long-range fight. Simply put, his foe had decided that it would lose to Suzuki Satoru in a shooting war of spells. From that point of view, he could conclude that even with ample mana, his opponent would not be able to make full use of it under these circumstances.

And the most important thing was that his foe had chosen close combat, while Suzuki Satoru had already summoned up a shield.

In that case, why had it waited until now to use tiered spells? As Suzuki Satoru thought, he arrived at a possible answer.

Cure Elim did not want to use the magic that he called “the Dragon Emperor’s filth.” Therefore, it had only cast aside his taboo against tiered magic right at the end, when it had been driven into desperation.

Ahhh, what an idiot.

Suzuki Satoru mocked Cure Elim’s stupidity.

In truth, Cure Elim could have won.

Due to the difference in their sizes, it could have trampled Suzuki Satoru flat. However, its carelessness, its ignorance, and most importantly, its arrogance had all contributed to its defeat.

Even in the face of this reckless suicide attack, Suzuki Satoru did not relax. That was because he suspected that it was an act, or it was looking for a chance to slip away.

Who knows, he might just run away on the spot.

As he considered that such a thing might happen, he prepared the spell that he would need to respond to it. That was also why Suzuki Satoru did not cast a spell, but kept looking straight at Cure Elim as he charge in.

The staff cast one of its once-a-day spells, <Vermilion Nova>, scorching Cure Elim's flesh.

However, it did not break its pace in the slightest. Was it because the undead felt no pain, or because its determination overrode it?

It doesn't matter anymore.

Indeed.

None of that mattered any more. There was no need to learn about Cure Elim's state of mind. It was just like how it would be pointless to speculated on the thoughts of an opponent which could not be baited in any way. All that was left was to wear it down until it was dead.

In front of Cure Elim, the Primal Water Elemental stood as a shield in front of Suzuki Satoru.

It did not intend to try for a lunge. Instead, Cure Elim seized the Primal Elemental's throat.

Perhaps it planned to use its weight to bowl over the summoned monster, but the Primal Elemental was resistant to such things. As one of the undead, surely Cure Elim's attacks could inflict various status ailments. However, the Primal Elemental was also highly resistant to such attacks. One could say that it was immune to virtually all negative effects.

As Cure Elim gnawed at its neck, it raked wildly with its sharp foreclaws. As expected of a high- tiered elemental, it still had vitality left over even after being attacked by a Dragon that was stronger than itself.

Ahhh, what an idiot. You had one more shot, so you should have used it.

As it tore at the Elemental's throat, Cure Elim locked its hate-twisted crimson eyes on Suzuki Satoru's

Cure Elim was almost out of stamina. That big, beautiful HP bar was now nearly depleted, like a candle in the wind.

The high-tier spells from the staff and Suzuki Satoru — who had concluded that his

foe would not try to escape — assailed Cure Elim as it grappled with the Primal Elemental.

The fire in its crimson eyes flared brightly — and then faded.

“Damn you damn youdamnyoudamnyou... damn you... damn... you...”

Still spilling curses from its mouth, Cure Elim’s ruined body began to disintegrate and flake away. Just then, the Primal Elemental’ slam attack hit with explosive force, and Cure Elim broke into two. Like a piece of spun glass, Cure Elim’s remnants scattered on the wind, and then vanished as though melting into the air.

There was nothing left — a most unprofitable victory. He could still have gotten some value out of a corpse, if one had remained. Was this because it was an undead Dragon? Or had it saved its last shot in order not to leave a corpse behind?

Suzuki Satoru had no idea.

“...Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, huh.”

The barrier around them had vanished, and all the undead responses were gone. Just in case, he ought to check the surrounding area to make sure it had been fully annihilated. While he had encountered many kinds of undead, he had not heard of any which could come back to life after being obliterated. Still, he could not entirely rule out the possibility.

“Haaah...” Suzuki Satoru sighed in relief.

“I didn’t get a chance to use the nuclear mine, the Death Knights, and the Overlord Undead General.”

There were two more cards he had not played yet, and he had held the upper hand throughout the second battle. However, he had been walking a tightrope during that fight. After all, his foe might very well have had aces in the hole. It was possible that he had just happened to negate all of his opponent’s moves and thus won handily.

That was why he hated fighting opponents that he knew little about.

He wanted to celebrate his victory, but he felt so little joy that it was pitiful.

This victory had not been because of his individual combat strength, but due to his use of tactics, a strategy which led to an eventual victory. Had any part of his plan failed, it would probably have been Suzuki Satoru and not Cure Elim who would have been destroyed just now. If he became arrogant because of this overwhelming victory, he might be the one to be annihilated next time. With that in mind, Suzuki Satoru stepped his caution up further.

And to some extent, Suzuki Satoru had lost.

I didn't manage to find a way to save Keno's parents, huh.

He had been worried that if he had remained obsessed with that information and Cure Elim had seen that, he would have no way to win. After all, if he exposed his weaknesses, it was possible that they could be exploited.

He had gone “tch” back then because he knew he had lost his only chance to gather information.

Suzuki Satoru looked around at the empty desert around him.

Since he did not know when Cure Elim’s reinforcements would arrive, it would be best to scan his surroundings for relevant information. But before that, there was something he needed to do.

“Now then, I need to send her a <Message>.”

◊ ◊ ◊

Should she have said that it was as she had expected? Before the door opened, the sight of the chains hanging on the handle in one piece had told her everything. Even so, Keno quietly closed her eyes, and then slowly opened them.

Nothing had changed. What she had seen just now was not some deception or illusionary landscape, but reality.

She was in the sewers of Inveria. Keno opened the hidden room that had been closed five years ago, but the three people inside were still mindless Zombies.

As she had thought, things would not go so easily.

“Keno...”

Behind her stood the mightiest magic caster in the world, and also Keno’s travelling companion. He called out to her in worry. Keno turned around, taking care to smile.

“Mm. No need to worry, Satoru. I’m not hurt by this. I just thought, it really was this way after all.”

“Is that so...”

“Mm... Say, Father, Mother.”

She looked at the three moaning people in the room, and addressed them.

“Satoru avenged everyone.”

They probably would not be happy even if she told her that, because they were not intelligent enough to be. She knew this would happen, but the pain stabbing at Keno’s heart eased a little.

“...Keno.”

“I’m fine. It’s alright, Satoru. You don’t need to worry. This world is a big place. Therefore — it’s possible that there might be an item that could help everyone, don’t you think?”

“Of course!”

There was no expression on Suzuki Satoru’s face, but his voice told her that he was very happy.

Surely anyone who could show feelings like this to others must be very kind.

“Yeah. The world is large. Let’s go see this world — together”

“Yeah. I know I might hold you back a little, but — I’ll be in your care, Satoru.”

“Ahh, I should be saying that, Keno.”

Keno looked back at her family members in the cell.

Would it be okay to leave them like this?

Keno clenched her hand into a fist.

Would killing them and freeing their souls from those hideous bodies not be a mercy? Perhaps those souls might still be suffering, even now.

But having one person deciding the fates of others — even if it was right to do so — might well be a very arrogant way of thinking. However, one could say that there was only one person who could make this decision, and that was Keno.

She had the feeling that she would not be able to find a way to restore her family to normal, even if she searched the entire world. That was why she had once abandoned that line of thought. However, now that Suzuki Satoru had destroyed the culprit behind the incident, it was true that Keno had gained a new sliver of hope.

She could feel Suzuki Satoru start to worry about her spacing out. It would seem she would have to make a decision right now. Otherwise, even Satoru would start agonizing over this.

This time, Suzuki Satoru had fought for her. In that case—

“—Time to hit the road again. Let’s go, Satoru.”

“Ah, ahhh, well, it’s good as long as you feel that way, Keno.”

She waved to the three people inside, and walked with Satoru.

Keno had chosen to leave the problem alone.

Originally, she should have chosen to finish off the three of them herself and not endanger Satoru any further. That was the proper way to thank someone who had shown such kindness to her. However, she still could not bring herself to do so, even now.

Keno looked at the sewer shrouded in darkness — at the room which held her family — one last time.

When she came back here again, would she come to rescue them, or destroy them?

Keno turned her eyes to Suzuki Satoru's back, a back she had been watching for nearly five years.

Then, she quickened her footsteps, until she was side by side with Satoru and holding his hand as they walked together. How long had it been since she had done such a child-like thing?

She could tell, more or less, from the way Suzuki Satoru had glanced down at her.

However, she did not say anything, and neither did Suzuki Satoru. His hand — his icy cold hand, from which one could not feel the slightest trace of body heat — felt warm to Keno.

And then, the two of them went forth.

Epilogue

EPILOGUE

There was a desert slightly to the southwest of the continent's center.

It was called the Dolor Desert, or perhaps the Di Gavorsa Desert, according to the great empire that had once stood here.

While it was quite an expansive desert, for certain reasons it received rainfall, and so various races — and monsters — lived here. There was the Great Kingdom of the Pabilsag scorpionmen, the small Genie nation of Slutarn, and the religious group which venerated the Clear Light Dragon as their chief deity — whose faith was widespread among nomads — had its main shrine in this place.

And at the edge of this desert was a gigantic tornado that came once every thirty years. It was thousands of meters across and immeasurably high.

While there were some differences in the exact timing of its appearance, the tornado occurred in exactly the same place at almost exactly the same time.

It was a remnant from a failed magical ritual by the great empire which had once existed here. The capital of this former empire protruded from beneath the sands. This phenomenon had been triggered by an incredibly powerful magic item known as the Scepter of the Sands. It had taken place after the Mushussu had been born and took to the skies. It was a gate leading to another world, and sucking everything out. There were many explanations along those lines, but everyone who had entered the tornado to try and unravel the mystery had never come back.

Many people had gone to explore the location before the tornado had come, but they had found a perfectly normal location, with no sign that anything existed there. Since one could predict the day of the tornado's occurrence, many people planned to wait in the spot where the eye of the storm would be when it appeared. But as expected, they never came back. Others tried to enter it from the air, and they had disappeared too.

Therefore, nobody had any idea why that tornado had appeared, or what was in its center.

And then, at some point, watching that gigantic tornado from a distance had become

an event that all the residents of the surrounding area participated in every 30 years.

The storm lashed at his body.

In places where walking was difficult like the desert, it was very difficult to resist strong winds, that threw one off balance. A person could easily fall down if they got careless.

If only I could use <The Creation>; who knows how much easier my path ahead could be?

If he suppressed this desert tornado with <The Creation>, and there was some reason that the origin of this tornado was doing it, it was possible that things might end without the mystery being solved. The reason why Suzuki Satoru had come up with a dumb idea like that — which had been immediately rejected for the above reason — was because his current conditions were really that taxing for him.

Suzuki Satoru shouted so he could be heard over the gales.

He was joined to his two companions behind him by a mithril chain.

He started by shouting to the one that he was most concerned for.

“Keno, are you alright!?”

A voice that matched Suzuki Satoru’s in volume came back at him.

It belonged to the New Ainz Ooal Gown’s Second Seat, Keno Fasris Invern.

“I’m fine!”

Although the girl’s voice was strong, he could not help but think there would be problems.

Take Keno and Satoru, for instance. Although Suzuki Satoru was nothing but bones, he was heavier compared to her. Therefore, it was more likely that Keno would get blown away.

Of course, he had had Keno carry various things, as if to weigh her down. However, she would sink into the desert sands if she carried too much.

“Keno! You should have waited in the inn after all! I’ll send you back with a teleportation spell once we reach the objective!”

“Are you still saying that even after coming all this way, Satoru!?” Keno replied, as though she had nothing to say. “You know you want to complete the journey with your own two feet, right?”

Suzuki Satoru smiled bitterly.

This was an incident from when they were climbing a peak said to be one of the highest on this continent.

While they had not managed to see the so-called “golden summit,” the memory of the conversation they had as they stood atop the apex of creation and looked down on everything was still clear in his mind.

“Yes. Back then, we had a conversation like this too! I still remember we were saying that while caught up in an avalanche!”

“Yeah! Pretty amazing, right?”

That incident had taken place halfway up the mountain.

While using <Fly> would have made things simple enough, it would have made things too boring, and so the two of them decided to use their superhuman strength to climb the rock face.

Then, an avalanche which blanked out their vision had occurred.

While cold damage did not harm either of them, the bludgeoning damage from the avalanche was still effective. Of course, they had expected something like that and cast defensive spells on themselves, but it had still left a deep impression.

Even after being buried by the avalanche, their immunity to movement impediments meant that they had popped out of the snow at the same time, whereupon they had a good laugh.

Powerful emotions were immediately suppressed due to the special qualities of the undead. As it turned to gentle good humor, Suzuki Satoru made that suggestion, and Keno had refused in a similar way.

Just as he was narrowing his eyes in nostalgia a voice came from behind them.

"Ifsssh only thatssh weressh me. I'msssh envioussssh. I'dsssh likesssh to sssshe thatsssh too."

The androgynous and very distinctive voice — though somewhat garbled — came from further behind Keno.

Although Suzuki Satoru could not see it through the severe sandstorm, there ought to have been a heteromorph that looked like a lump of sand over there.

He was the Fourth Seat of the New Ainz Ooal Gown, Nurunuru.

He was a mutant offshoot of the Roper race, a Herdroper. Herdopers had a hive mind, but some were occasionally born that were not part of it. And he was one of them. When Suzuki Satoru, Keno, and Scraea had found the Herdroper, it had indicated its desire to travel with them.

Incidentally, it had no personal name, so Suzuki Satoru had named him Nurunuru. It was supposed to be a temporary name at first, but it had decided to use it.

His — although he could have been a her — voice was made by two tentacles that were open at the end, called voice strands. Therefore, a lot of excess noise got into his voice in places like this. However, he had the special ability of being able to cast spells without verbal or somatic components, and to instantly cast them while standing stock still. It was truly mysterious.

"Haha! Nu, I have no idea what you're saying!"

That voice had come from inside Suzuki Satoru's cloak.

"Me too — gweh!"

The voice cut off halfway, probably because sand had gotten into its mouth.

This was the Fifth Seat of the New Ainz Ooal Gown, Crystal of the Gnator race.

It was a race that was less than 20 centimeters long, with translucent wings that resembled those of Fairies, but they looked more like insects. Their similarity to fairies was used to deceive and prey on Fairies, because they were a carnivorous race.

Although he did not think they were related to Fairies, spells which only affected humanoids and demihumans had no effect on them, and so he was considered a heteromorph and allowed to join. However, he was also immune to spells that should have been effective on heteromorphs, so Suzuki Satoru had always had his doubts about whether this was actually the case.

Nurunuru was a psychic magic caster, while Crystal held a thief-type profession — namely that of assassin. He and Crystal had once clashed during a certain incident, but they became friends after yet another incident.

“Crystal, you’d be better off not talking. Still, has it been so long that you’re feeling nostalgic for that time?”

“It was about 40 years ago, right!?”

“Has it? It’s been so long...”

Suzuki Satoru muttered to himself, and looked ahead.

The tornado lashed at the sands and completely obscured his vision, Suzuki Satoru’s undead body could see through darkness, but not through sandstorms. Keno was the same in that respect. Nurunuru had no eyes, but he could obtain information about his surroundings through sensing the vibrations around him.

“—When you put it that way, we really have been to all kinds of places!”

“Yes! We’ve been to—” Keno’s happy voice was suddenly cut off. “Bleh! The sand got into my mouth!”

Of course, Keno had put a mask on before entering this sandstorm. It was Suzuki Satoru’s beloved Mask of Jealousy. Lending Keno a mask that she considered to be in bad taste was largely because he wanted to prank her.

The reason why sand had gotten into Keno’s mouth even with the mask on was probably because of the gap created when she spoke.

Suzuki Satoru snickered to himself in a way that nobody could hear. However, she had still heard Suzuki Satoru laugh quietly amidst the savage sandstorm. Keno retorted in an unhappy tone.

“It’s not fair, Satoru! It’s not like sand gets into your mouth!”

“Indeed — gweh!”

Crystal smiled bitterly to Keno as he answered her.

“No, there’s still a strange feeling of something getting in there. Still, I should say it’s hardly unpleasant, or should I say I don’t mind at all?”

“Ssshuushhhushu.”

“...Nu, I have no idea what you’re saying!”

“It’s still unfair! If only I had a body like yours, Satoru!”

“Isn’t it fine like this? If you ask me, a body like yours is better, Keno. That way you don’t get caught up in annoying things!”

“That’s because a fight breaks out the moment you show your face, Satoru...”

That was how things went when the undead were hated everywhere.

“Still, you draw a lot of trouble on your own too, Keno!”

Sometimes, Keno got into sticky situations when collecting information. This tended to be especially true in unsafe areas. That said, while she was the weakest member of the New Ainz Ooal Gown, she was still much stronger than the average person, and she could easily take care of the average punk who thought he had some skills.

The problem came in places with good security, because of the people who tried to take her in out of kindness.

If they had ill intentions she could have settled it with violence, but it was very hard to deal with their goodwill.

Heteromorphs who wanted to travel in peace occasionally faced such problems.

“It seems humanoids are always troublesome... and if we hide our true forms, people look at us with curious eyes...”

Humanoids' position in the big scheme of things was very low. It was because they were weak that they caused problems easily.

As the two of them sighed, there was a *dosu* sound by his feet. Or rather, it was a *zdun*.

Suzuki Satoru bent down and investigated the vicinity of the sound. He fished a rock out of the sand. No, it was a tapered stone that looked tougher than ordinary rock. It must have been blown here by the strong wind.

Suzuki Satoru pricked up his ears.

“Shuuuuooohuuuushuuuunnnn!”

“What are you say — koff koff!”

“Look out! It's not just one or two of them! There's a whole lot of stones headed our way!”

He could hear the sounds of countless objects cutting through the winds amidst the sound of the gale.

It was very difficult to avoid those stones flying at them in a place with poor visibility like this. Perhaps they might have been safe if they were encased in extremely hard armor, but it was impossible to wear that sort of thing and walk around in the desert.

This was definitely an attack which could annihilate any expedition.

“Everyone! Defend yourselves as you advance! Keno, are you alright?”

There was no telling how long it would be before they would be able to pass through this, but since this was flying debris thrown up by the tornado, stopping here or making a shelter would be meaningless.

“I'm fine! Keep going!”

“Shuuoonnn!”

Keno replied in the affirmative. So did Nurunuru — or at least, that was what he thought.

Nurunuru cast a defense spell on himself, while Keno used the power of the ultimate Vampire, The One.

After plundering all the research of “Corpus of the Abyss,” she had researched it and gained this power. However, it was a realm that was only supposed to be reachable by more powerful entities. Since she had attained it with a weak body, its potency was greatly reduced. In that case, she ought to be called a Lesser One.

If there were any difficulties, he was planning to lend her a magic item which rendered her immune to normal missiles — that is, ones that were not enchanted — but it would seem that was not necessary.

Suzuki Satoru’s long robe protected Crystal’s body, and it kept him safe from everything except sand particles.

Suzuki Satoru himself was immune to all attacks below level 60.

“—Satoru!”

“What’s wrong, Keno!”

“It’s getting pretty interesting now, isn’t it!”

She was not being ironic or making fun of her circumstances. She sounded like she was wholeheartedly enjoying this.

“That’s right, Keno!”

Suzuki Satoru felt the same way.

It was this difficulty which made the two of them — no, the members of the New Ainz Ooal Gown — happy.

Making friends and wandering the length and breadth of the world with them. Witnessing all manner of mysteries and going where no man had gone before. That was why they knew that overcoming these trials would only make their joy all the sweeter.

“Here we go! Don’t get blown away!”

“Yup!”

“Ssshuuuu!”

“Yeah — ggubfff!”

The flying debris struck them over and over again, but none of them seemed to mind as they forged on ahead.

“Satoru! Hold on! The spell seems like it’s about to wear off!”

“Keno! I’m counting on you!”

“Okay!”

Keno took hold of a scroll in her bag and took it out, taking care not to let it get blown away.

“<Mass Compass>!”

This second tier spell was a multi-target version of the first tier spell <Compass>. This was the reason why these people could unerringly hone in on their destination — the eye of the tornado.

“Thanks, Keno!”

“Shuoooonnn!”

“Mm, you’re welcome, Satoru, Nu! From what I can tell, we’re not far from our destination!”

“Ahhh! Got it!”

Each member of the New Ainz Ooal Gown had their own share of responsibility.

Among them, the Second Seat (Keno), the Sixth Seat (Brandona), and the Seventh Seat (Muki) were responsible for collecting information. Naturally, the others had their own responsibilities as well.

This had not been decided after discussion, and neither had they been forced into their role. Rather, they had ended up that way before they knew it. Also, the three of them further divided the work among themselves.

Incidentally, the First Seat, Suzuki Satoru, was responsible for coordinating them and

for combat.

They ignored the steadily-increasing number of flying stones and their growing force, instead advancing without hesitation.

“Just a little more!”

“Got it!”

“Shuuuunn!”

“Ohh- gueh!”

And at last—

“Uwaaah!”

—Their vision cleared up.

Keeno cried out in joy.

The wind suddenly vanished. When they looked behind them, what looked like black walls extended forever up and down, left and right.

Looking around, it seemed as though they had entered a gigantic tube.

What they saw after that was a vast, yet silent expanse of pure white sand. While it was marred by the occasional ripple, it did not grow overly large, and all they could see everywhere was white.

“Hey! Look! The sky!”

As though drawn by Keno’s voice, Suzuki Satoru, Crystal — who had poked his head out of Suzuki Satoru’s robe — and probably Nurunuru as well, all looked up to the heavens.

The night sky came into view, but this was not like an ordinary night sky. The stars seemed very close to them.

It was just like in childrens’ fairy tales — the big, bright shining stars looked as if they

could just reach out and touch them.

It made him think of the past — when they had stood on the summit of the highest mountain on the continent — no, the distance to the sky made him feel like the peak he had ascended had been even higher.

“But why? Why do the stars look like they’re so close to us?”

“Perhaps it’s due to atmospheric diffraction?”

Nurunuru’s voice-strands vibrated as he explained. Suzuki Satoru simply nodded.

“Huh?”

“My guess is that the atmosphere has been warped, forming what seems to be a gigantic lens. Perhaps it was caused by the tornado? That might be the case.”

“Nu, what was all that just now?”

“In other words, there’s something like a telescope above our heads?”

“A... telescope? Is it one of those things invented by that weird technology called science?”

“Science is dumb, the stuff it makes can’t compare to magic items.”

Crystal was not the least bit shy about saying that. In truth, the fact that magic could create something out of nothing meant that there was nothing wrong with saying it was better than science.

This was just a hypothesis, but Suzuki Satoru felt that all the technology that he understood could be reproduced through magic. However, learning magic required talent and everyone’s aptitude was different. Some people could learn magic and others could not.

Crystal’s words indicated that he belonged to the former group.

Suzuki Satoru clapped his hands.

“Now then, let’s go investigate the source of this phenomenon before the tornado

vanishes.”

“Alright, but it doesn’t look like there’s anything. The cause of this phenomenon is still a mystery.”

“Mhm, I can’t sense any turbulence in the elements around here either. Leader, what about the magical end of things?”

Suzuki Satoru cast a spell and looked out into the distance.

“Nothing there either. It wasn’t caused by a spell, I think.”

Keno flew to a certain height, and then descended to the ground.

“I don’t see anything that looks like a building around here... what on earth is this?”

“A natural phenomenon? That’s the only way we can explain it, right?”

After hearing Suzuki Satoru say that, the others responded in agreement. Much like how reverse waterfalls that flowed up existed, there were many bizarre sights in this world that were natural occurrences.

“In any case, let’s go to the center of the tornado and take a look. After that, we’ll explore a little and if we don’t find anything — we’ll go stargazing.”

Nobody objected to this, and the group flew towards the center of the tornado with Crystal leading the way. And then—

“There’s nothing here.”

“Nothing, huh?”

“There shouldn’t be anything, right?”

“What a shame.”

That was the result of a rough search.

“What should we do now, Leader? Keep looking?”

Suzuki Satoru shrugged at Nurunuru's question.

"There's no need, I guess. If we can't find it, then we can't find it. It doesn't matter. Besides, our aim was to go where nobody else had set foot before, and since we've done that — everyone's free to do whatever they want until the tornado vanishes."

"Then I'll go take a walk around the area with Nu."

"Ah? Well, that's fine too. I understand. Let's go, then."

"You're really going? Then take care not to stray too far."

The two of them voiced their acknowledgement as they left together.

Despite what Suzuki Satoru had said, he was not worried about their safety. In YGGDRASIL terms, they were easily above level 40. They were among the most powerful beings in the world, and the two of them had excellent sensory abilities. Even if ambushed, they were skilled enough to return alive.

"Satoru, then what should we do?"

"Want to go take a walk around here too?"

"Yup!"

Keno began to run.

Her footprints marked the pure white sand. Suzuki Satoru followed her footprints, his strides slightly larger than when he usually went walking with Keno. Still, this was just fine for Suzuki Satoru.

In the end, Keno sat on the sand and slowly lay down. Suzuki Satoru sat down beside her, and then lay down beside her.

"The stars are so big."

"Yeah, they're really big."

If only his companions — his friends from Ainz Ooal Gown could see this marvellous sight.

Those were memories from roughly 200 years ago, and after each adventure with Keno and the others, they had gradually faded away.

But as he remembered the faces of the only friends he ever had, Suzuki Satoru looked on the mysterious vistas with nostalgia in his heart.

“Still, this really is amazing.”

“Yeah, seeing this means our trip wasn’t in vain.”

“Yeah...”

The two of them lay on the sand in silence, watching this wonder of the world, a marvel whose veil of mystery nobody else had managed to pull back until now.

And then — the stars gradually shrank, or perhaps they were slowly returning to normal. Suzuki Satoru propped himself up, and saw that the walls of the tornado surrounding them were slowly receding.

“It’s over, huh.”

“Yeah, it’s going to end. It’ll be another 30 years before we can see something like this. Now then... want to tell the others about what we saw here?”

Suzuki Satoru asked Keno, who stood up and shook her head.

“How can you see the rainbow if you don’t go through the storm?”

“That makes sense, you’ve got that right. See, I managed to get the better of you just now.”

Suzuki Satoru smiled.

“Oh my, the two of you seem pretty happy! Did anything special happen?”

“Nothing special, no.”

The other two had probably seen the tornado start to fade, and so they had returned. They did not seem to be holding any finds. Perhaps they really had been strolling around for a while.

“Let’s head back to the inn, then.”

“Yup. Do the honors, Satoru. But before that, let’s shake off the sand on ourselves. It’s only a little, but I don’t want to bring it back to our room.”

Everyone patted down their clothes and shook off the sand. Nurunuru was wearing an item that Suzuki Satoru had lent him, and he helped the others pat their clothes clean.

After that, Suzuki Satoru cast *<Gate>*, and the group returned to their room in the inn.

“We’ll be off, then.”

“Thanks, everyone.”

“Thank you, thank you.”

“Thanks for your hard work, everyone. Hope you all have a good night.”

Nurunuru and Crystal — who was sitting on his head — left the room.

“I’m soooo tired,” Keno said. That made no sense, however. Both of them were undead, and they would not accumulate exhaustion. However, Suzuki Satoru understood her meaning. Her fatigue was not of the body, but of the mind.

“You’re tired too, huh, Keno?”

Suzuki Satoru shed the robe on his body and changed into something else in an instant. That was because the robe he had been wearing earlier had a quick-change effect on it. Keno changed in a similar manner.

Suzuki Satoru flopped down on the sofa in the room and took pen and paper out of his inventory.

This was his diary.

He did not write in it every day, but only when something special happened. Thus, he was only on his fourth volume after 200 years.

He opened a new page, planning to write down what he had seen today, but then he

felt a familiar weight pressing down on him.

“...Keno, why don’t you go take a bath? I was planning to make an entry in my diary...”

“Yeah, go ahead and write.”

“...That’s not what I mean. How am I supposed to write my diary with you clinging to my back?”

“Hm, then you can write it on the way back.”

In his heart, Suzuki Satoru shook his head and sighed.

“—Fine fine fine, as my Princess commands.”

“Mm, well done, my knight.”

I was her court wizard last time, Suzuki Satoru thought as he closed his diary. While he could have just ignored her and continued writing in his diary, it would cause problems in the future. While the intense emotions of the undead would be quickly suppressed, letting subtle grudges build only made them stronger.

“What do you plan to do next? Where shall we go?”

“I was thinking... in the past, the big nations in the center were just places we passed through. Perhaps we ought to establish a base for ourselves so we can tour the surroundings. Maybe we could look into an abandoned city.”

There were many nations in the center of the continent where the humanoid species were on the bottom of the totem pole. They were all troublesome countries for people like Keno with humanoid appearances. While they allowed travellers certain rights, they were by no means safe places.

For instance, she had once been treated as an escaped meal in the market of an Orc nation.

And in the land of the Minotaurs, someone had said, “Let’s see who treats their slaves better,” and she had “experienced” the so-called slave life too. Troublesome things like that had happened to her too.

In the case of the former, she had covered it up by breaking a pair of arms and part of their ribs. As for the latter, she had let them experience the slave life themselves and then asked them how it felt.

"An abandoned city... so you mean the one where they say a lot of people died because Soul Eaters showed up? It seems the entire city was preserved intact..."

"Exactly. Entry's forbidden, but we can go if we want, right?"

"Yes, going there sounds pretty good."

Suzuki Satoru laughed.

For many years, they had been to places where normal people could not set foot. Or rather, if they heard of some sanctuary or divine place, they would take it upon themselves to go there. As for why, well, it was because they had once found a World-Class Item there once.

That was how Keno had obtained her item — the Two-World Mandala.

They had seen other World-Class Items during their journey.

However, they had owners, so they did not seize them. Suzuki Satoru originally wanted to take them, but he did not, because he had Keno by his side. After all, he did not want to do anything awkward like mugging people in front of Keno.

The Two-World Mandala had once been a national treasure, but the country that had served as its sanctuary had been destroyed, and then a new country had sprung up in its place. Thus, they pretended that it was ownerless. In compensation, they left behind many items and huge gems and such, and so the two of them managed to get around that particular pitfall.

"But I want to head west."

"The west? What's over there?"

He looked through his memories, but he could not recall anything worth noting on the west.

"Well, it's information from Mu-chan. He said that three countries had fallen in the

north of the continent. Therefore, I wanted to head west and see what's going on."

Since it was information from the Seventh Seat, it ought to be true.

He looked completely unlike what the cute nickname of Mu-chan would suggest, but perhaps it was different in the eyes of his mother — or perhaps his sister. Suzuki Satoru discarded the question of his appearance for a moment and began recalling the world map.

"The northwest... borders..."

He recalled that 200 years ago, there had been a few human nations up there, but since it was in the hinterlands, he had not thought much about it.

"Well, it's true that nations being destroyed isn't exactly uncommon, but for three to go down at once..."

There were incredibly powerful monsters in the world, and sometimes they would show up, annihilate a nation or two, and then new countries would take their place. Granted, some large nations might not be destroyed so easily, but it was not rare for such things to serve as the spark for internal unrest or invasion, eventually leading to the nation's destruction. But to his recollection, he had not heard of several countries being destroyed at the same time.

"What on earth happened?"

Just as Suzuki Satoru was about to turn around and look at Keno — who was lying on his back, he heard her exclaim "Ack!" in a cute way before she fell off.

"Meanie! Don't move around!"

"...After you, after you."

Suzuki flopped down on the table again and Keno mounted him once more.

"Well, I think he said something about a nest of really powerful demons showing up."

"A nest? Of powerful demons?"

"Mm. What was it called? — The Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick?"

“—Eh?”

That name sounded somewhat familiar.

OVERLORD
Character Profiles



キーノ・ ファスリス・インベルン

異形種

keno fasris invern

亡国の吸血姫、
新生AINZ·ウール・
ゴウン第二席

住居——住所不定(悟の隣)。

誕生日——青色41日

趣味——世界を旅し、
様々なものを一緒に見ること。

| | | |
|-------|-------------------|-----|
| 種族レベル | トゥルーヴアンパイア 真祖 | 7lv |
| | レツサー・ワン 劣化吸血祖神 | 4lv |
| 職業レベル | ヴァンパイアプリンセス | 3lv |
| | ソーサラー | 8lv |
| | セージ | 5lv |
| | ハイ・セージ | 7lv |

[種族レベル] + [職業レベル] ————— 計34レベル

●種族レベル

取得総計11レベル

職業レベル

取得総計23レベル

被称为伊维尔哀的少女的另一个可能性。顺便一说，右侧列出来的是在 Epilogue 时间点的数据，因为有着铃木悟这一强大守护者的存在，等级来说远比伊维尔哀要低得多，习得的职业也不见得有多适合她。这是依据她与铃木悟一同进行冒险时得来的经验，最终选择的道路。

另外兴趣也有所改变，所以并没有开发什么特殊的魔法。

相对的，她拥有着能够弥补铃木悟薄弱部分（知识之类）的职业，因而被铃木悟十分看重。当然了，同为公会成员也是其看重的原因之一。

她的天生异能是「将承受到的，或是见到的任何魔法——仅限一个——储存起来，并且能够将其作为自己习得的魔法来使用」这么一种能力。即便是超位魔法或是始源魔法也没问题。但发动时的能力值是按照她自身来计算的，需要支付的代价当然也是需要支付的。比如说由她来发动超位魔法〈天空坠落〉的话，发动时仍然会花费相应的时间，能力值加成上也会比较低，所以相比安兹所发动的同样魔法，在破坏力方面会弱一些。但是、发动魔法所必须的能力值等前提条件会视为已经满足了的。

还有就是、储存中的魔法也不能靠主观意愿直接解除，只能通过使用一次方式来将其释放，要说也勉强算是这个异能的一个弱点吧。而是否储存，则能够根据她的意愿来选择。然而、就像后文所说的那样“能够熟练使用该能力”这件事本身就是一个不可能出现的、仅仅建立在可能性之上的说法。

她之所以没有变成僵尸，而是成为了吸血鬼，是因为她当时在潜意识下使用异能复制了裘亚伊利姆的始源魔法，吸收周围人们的灵魂，成为了裘亚伊利穆原本所计划的不死者——另一个裘亚伊利穆。但持续的发动（严格来说的话其实不太一样）该魔法才使得她能够维持自我意识。因此这个异能已经无法用作他途，假如说这个异能——或者说始源魔法被解除了的话，她就会变成无自我意识的僵尸。

虽然她在新生安兹·乌尔·恭位居第二把交椅，但战斗能力和等级都是最低的。不过那长年积累下来的知识，为她赢得了各个成员的尊敬，以贤者的身份受到众人推崇。而且她还十分擅长支援铃木悟那样的怪物，无论在谁眼中，她都是名副其实的副队长。

Character 58



琪诺·法斯莉丝·茵蓓伦

异形种

keno faoris invern

亡国的吸血姬
新生安兹·乌尔·恭第二席

居所——住所不定（铃木悟的身边）

生日——青色41日

兴趣——周游世界，

与铃木悟一同游览各地的新鲜事物。

| | |
|--------------------------------|------|
| 种族等级——真祖 (True Vampire) | 7 Lv |
| 劣化吸血祖神 (Lesser One) | 4 Lv |
| 职业等级——吸血鬼公主 (Vampire Princess) | 3 Lv |
| 妖术师 (Sorcerer) | 8 Lv |
| 贤人 (Sage) | 5 Lv |
| 高等贤人 (High Sage) | 7 Lv |

[种族等级]•[职业等级]

种族等级

累计取得11级

总计34级

职业等级

累计取得23级

图源 ????

翻译 Aria_Advance

校验 夜の無

美工 银雪星霜

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KENO FASRIS INVERN

Vampire Princess of the Lost Country
Second Seat of the New Ainz Ooal Gown

Residence: Unclear (by Suzuki Satoru's side)

Birthday: Blue 41st

Hobbies: Exploring the world, seeing new things with Suzuki Satoru

Racial Levels (11 total)

- True Vampire 7
- Lesser One 4

Job Levels (23 total)

- Vampire Princess 3
- Sorcerer 8
- Sage 5
- High Sage 7

Another possibility for the girl called Evileye. Incidentally, the data displayed on the right is for her appearance in the Epilogue. Since she has a powerful protector like Suzuki Satoru around, she is much lower level than Evileye, and the job classes she has trained aren't very suitable for her. This is the path she eventually chose after her adventures with Suzuki Satoru

Her interests have also changed, so she didn't develop any special spells.

In turn, she has job levels that make up for Suzuki Satoru's weaknesses (mainly knowledge-type jobs), and so Suzuki Satoru values her highly. Of course, he also values her because she's a guild member.

Her Talent is "the ability to store any spell that she has seen or been targeted with — but only one — and use it for her own." She can even use it on super-tier spells or Wild Magic. However, when casting the spells, its effects are calculated from her own stats, and she has to pay any costs that need to be paid. For instance, if she were to cast Fallen Down, it would take the same amount of time to cast, and it would work off her lower ability scores, so it would be less damaging than the same spell as cast by Ainz. However, she will be counted as having met the ability requirements for casting the spell.

Also, she cannot willingly dismiss the stored spell. She can only release it by using it once, which can be taken, as a stretch, to be a weakness. As for whether a spell is stored, that depends on whether she is willing to do so. However, just like the "ability that she could use proficiently" that was mentioned in the epilogue, this is something that was impossible to begin with and is merely founded on possibilities.

The reason why she did not become a Zombie but a Vampire instead is because she was subconsciously using her Talent to replicate Cure Elim's Wild Magic and absorbed the souls of the people around her, becoming the undead being that Cure Elim had originally planned to be — another Cure Elim. However, her sapience is only maintained through sustaining the spell (strictly speaking, it's not quite the same as his). Therefore, her Talent can no longer be used for other purposes, and if this Talent — or perhaps the Wild Magic — were dispelled, she would become a mindless Zombie.

While she holds the Second Seat in the New Ainz Ooal Gown, she is the weakest fighter and lowest- levelled member. However, her knowledge accumulated over long periods has earned her the respect of the various members, and she is hailed by many as a sage. In addition, she is very skilled at helping the monstrous Suzuki Satoru. There is no doubt that she is the group's No. 2.



キュアイーリム＝ロスマルヴァー

異形種

cure elim=los malvar

元、■■の竜王 現、朽棺の竜王

住居——ケイテニアス山。

誕生日——不明。

趣味——己の強化。

| | | | |
|-------|-----------------|-----|-------|
| 種族レベル | ドラゴリング | 幼年 | 10 lv |
| | ヤング | 若年 | 10 lv |
| | アダルト | 青年 | 10 lv |
| | オールド | 老年 | 10 lv |
| | エルダー | 長老 | 5 lv |
| | エインシャント | 古老 | 5 lv |
| | トゥルーヴアンパイア・ドラゴン | 真祖竜 | 1 lv |

| | | | |
|-----|-------|--------------|-------|
| クラス | 職業レベル | プリミティブキャスター | 10 lv |
| | | ドラゴンネクロマンサー | 7 lv |
| | | ワールドコネクター | 9 lv |
| | | オーバードラゴン | 10 lv |
| | | ソウル・プラスフィーマー | 7 lv |
| | | ソーサラー | 1 lv |

[種族レベル] + [職業レベル] —— 計95レベル

●種族レベル

職業レベル●

取得総計51レベル

取得総計44レベル

在诸位龙王之中，分为针对玩家做出强化自身或集结战友进行了准备的派系，以及毫无准备的派系两类。加入了前者那松散同盟的（在建立的时间点）六头龙，是即便与100级玩家作战，也胜负未知的强大存在。

归属于这一同盟的裘亚伊里穆开发出来的“灭魂”，即便在始源魔法中也是最强最恶的一种，能与其相匹敌的始源魔法（且不论现在是否仍存于世上）仅有五种。说句题外话、关于最恶这一形容词是否正确，其实还是存在一个疑问的，为此这里就暂且不提这个例外了。

“灭魂”是在常暗龙王的始源魔法基础之上，向着更为恶劣的方向发展而成的。除了少数得到世界守护的存在之外，任何人都会毫无抵抗的被其杀死。该魔法所造成的死亡乃是灵魂的消灭，通常的复活方法是无法令其复活的。但是其消耗也极为惊人，即使是成为了不死者的裘亚伊里穆也仅能使用三次这一魔法。

通常而言、死了——成为了不死者的龙王是无法使用始源魔法的。然而裘亚伊里穆使用自己创造的始源魔法，吸取周边的大量灵魂，将其集结起来以抵消不死者化的缺口，从而达成使用始源魔法的效果。但这就相当于是消耗一种无法恢复的MP来使用魔法，每次使用时都会彻底摧毁一定量的灵魂。因此一旦灵魂消耗殆尽，它自身就会变成无自我意识的僵尸龙。所以、它在理解了这个魔法并不会有任何效果之后，并没有施放最后一次。其他较为低阶的始源魔法倒是可以正常使用。

龙王虽然不能使用阶位魔法，但不再是龙王，成为了不死者的它是可以使用死灵系阶位魔法的。裘亚伊里穆就是利用这种类似规则漏洞的手段来增强自身的。

战斗经验的缺失、对阶位魔法的轻视、对情报重要性的无知、与同族的协同不充分等多方原因造成了它的败北。但是、想要击败裘亚伊里穆，最少也得有足以击杀数百万僵尸的输出能力或耐久力，能够做到的也就只有其他龙王或是持有世界级道具的人了吧。可以说、单一个体几乎没有将其击败的可能性，但集结团队前来挑战的话，又会被“灭魂”瞬间灭团。

从这个角度来讲，铃木悟简直可以说是裘亚伊里穆的天敌了。

再说句题外话、以生者的状态使用“灭魂”这种事，即使是裘亚伊里穆也是做不到的。但如果抱着灵魂消亡的觉悟或许一次……还是有可能的？



裘亚伊里穆=洛斯莫瓦

异形种

cure elum-los malvar

原称 ■■龙王
现称 枯棺之龙王

居所——凯提尼阿斯山脉

生日——不明

兴趣——强化自身

| | |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| 种族等级——幼年 (Drageling) | 10 Lv |
| 少年 (Young) | 10 Lv |
| 青年 (Adult) | 10 Lv |
| 老年 (Old) | 10 Lv |
| 长老 (Elder) | 5 Lv |
| 古老 (Ancient) | 5 Lv |
| 真祖龙 (True Vampire Dragon) | 1 Lv |
| 职业等级——始源术士 (Primalist) | 10 Lv |
| 龙族死灵法师 (Dragon Necromancer) | 7 Lv |
| 世界联结者 (World Connector) | 9 Lv |
| 龙族超越者 (Overed Dragon) | 10 Lv |
| 渎魂者 (Soul Blasphemer) | 7 Lv |
| 妖术师 (Sorcerer) | 1 Lv |

图源 ????

翻译 Aria_Advance

校验 夜の無

美工 银雪星霜

[种族等级]+[职业等级]

种族等级

累计取得51级

总计95级

职业等级

累计取得44级

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CURE ELIM=LOS MALVAR

Former XX Dragon Lord

Current Elder Coffin Dragon Lord

Residence: Kaidinias Mountain Range

Birthday: Unknown

Hobbies: Strengthening Himself

Racial Levels (51 total)

- Dragonling 10
- Young 10
- Adult 10
- Old 10
- Elder 5
- Ancient 5
- True Vampire Dragon 1

Job Levels (44 total)

- Primitive 10
- Dragon Necromancer 7
- World Connector 9
- Overed Dragon 10
- Soul Blasphemer 7
- Sorcerer 1

Among the many Dragon Lords, there is a faction of those who have strengthened themselves and gathered comrades in order to deal with Players, and those who have not. There were six Dragons (at the time of its founding) who joined the former faction. Were they to fight level 100 players, the outcome of their battle would be in doubt.

Cure Elim, as part of this alliance, developed "Soulbreaker", which is one of the most powerful and most wicked techniques in Wild Magic. There are only five kinds of Wild Magic (leaving aside whether or not they actually exist) which can contend with it. Incidentally, the accuracy of calling it "most wicked" remains to be seen, and so we shall not touch on that exception for the moment.

"Soulbreaker" was derived from the Deep Darkness Dragon Lord's Wild Magic, albeit

an inferior version. Apart from a handful of people who have the protection of a world, anyone else will be instantly slaughtered without any hope of resisting it. The death caused by this magic is the destruction of the soul, and normal resurrection cannot revive its victims. However, it is also extraordinarily draining and even the undead Cure Elim can only use this spell three times.

Usually, after dying — becoming undead, in other words — a Dragon Lord cannot use Wild Magic. However, Cure Elim used its own Wild Magic to absorb a great deal of souls from around it, and used them to compensate for the failings of the undead transformation, thus giving it the ability to use Wild Magic. However, it is like casting spells from an MP bar that cannot be restored, and every time he casts it, it utterly destroys a fixed number of souls. Therefore, once it consumes all its souls, it will become a mindless Dragon Zombie. Therefore once it realized that this magic was useless, it did not use it for the last time. However, it can use lower-level Wild Magic as normal.

While Dragon Lords cannot cast tiered spells, it is no longer a Dragon Lord but an undead being, so it can cast necromantic tiered spells. Cure Elim used this loophole to strengthen itself.

It lacked fighting experience and looked down on tiered magic, and did not know the importance of gathering information, and its lack of cooperation with its fellows led to its defeat. However, in order to defeat Cure Elim, one must be able to deliver enough damage to kill millions of Zombies first, and the only people who can do that are probably other Dragon Lords or holders of World-Class Items. One could say that it would be almost impossible for an individual to defeat it. However, fighting it in a group would lead to them being instantly annihilated by "Soulbreaker".

From that point of view, Suzuki Satoru is pretty much Cure Elim's nemesis.

As another aside, even the living Cure Elim would not be able to use "Soulbreaker", but if it were willing to destroy its own soul... perhaps it might be able to do it once?

AFTERWORD

The author's expression corner known as the Afterword has begun — since I didn't write it there, I'll write it here! Since I'm as excited to be writing here as I am over there, please understand if I make any minor mistakes!

Hm? This isn't written in the same style as the afterwords to date? Hm. That might be so. After all, I didn't even write in the thanks at the end! Perhaps all the author's thoughts have always been like that!

—And so, this is the 14th book to me. Therefore, while I apologize to those people who are looking forward to Volume 14, Maruyama's heart is filled with the feeling that he's finished Volume 14. The next one will be Volume 15~

How do you feel after reading this spinoff?

Do you think Suzuki Satoru, as the MC of a LN, feels different from how Overlord has been until now?

The battle scene in this book might have ended up becoming confusing. Originally, perhaps there might have been a need to go "this is why he did so and so" but I deliberately omitted it. This work really does place a big burden on its readers. Perhaps I might have failed as a LN author, but like I've said many times, I personally think "it doesn't matter if you don't understand."

Incidentally, while my editor keeps telling me "please make it easier to understand," I haven't heard him say that recently. Like how I don't want to clearly refer to Mare as a man and all that. Though I've been using my own made up terms, so I think "everyone who knows gets it, right?" But then the editor stopped me from doing that. Ah, how nostalgic. That's a story from behind the scenes when I was writing the first volume.

This was supposed to be a deluxe edition bonus, but I selfishly insisted that they publish it as a book. Does it feel like it could stand on the shelves with the other volumes? If so, that would make me very happy. Also, I originally wanted to add the stories of the first of the Thirteen Heroes at the end, but I felt that it would mess with the tone of the epilogue, so I removed it. I have the feeling Overlord will end without those stories ever being told!

Now, my thoughts about the various characters:

Satoru-san: He's a man who routinely plays dirty to win. You should have seen how noble he was when fighting Shalltear. That said, this Satoru-san is the one who comes off as a good guy overall. Perhaps he would be this way if not for Nazarick. Does he seem like someone else? But he ought to have a personality that's just as twisted as his main line incarnation.

Keno-san: Did she achieve happiness in this story...? Very well, then... ahem!

As for what will happen after the epilogue, Maruyama has a vague idea for that in his mind. But please, imagine it however you like, everyone.

...But how will things develop? Will they fight? Will they run? Or will they meet? Or perhaps an even more different path? I would be very glad if you think "If I could write it" when you go to bed. I have the feeling that if Satoru-san shared his knowledge with them, the New Ainz Ooal Gown could finish off the Pleiades by themselves. They would be the world's dream team. Well, as long as no other powerful beings join the battle.

Cure Elim-kun: Anyone who saw the character sheet at the end of the book should understand that he's five levels lower than Satoru-san, so Satoru-san can definitely beat him — well, if you think that, you'd be wrong. Even if they're both level 100, Touch Me-san is way stronger than someone with 100 job levels. In contrast, as a member of the Dragon Race and with powerful job classes, Cure Elim-kun is actually more powerful than his 95 levels imply. Of course, thanks to level-based damage adjustment, his odds of victory are lower. Whether or not he really exists in the mainline novels is a secret for now. But if he does exist, his 200 years of study and accumulation mean that he will have fewer weaknesses than in this book.

Well, that's how I feel about all that. Well, I look forward to seeing you in the next volume, which comes out in the middle of this year in the Maruyama Calendar.

Bye bye.

2019 April Maruyama Golden



PtFF by: traktorA7EN