



Cautious Hero

Season 2

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Chapter 52: Reunion and Change (1)

Inside the temple of the God's realm. I stood on the summoning chamber, the one with a vast white space as far as the eye could see...I drew the magical chart on the floor of the summoning chamber. My breath was heavy.

Shortly after I received the heroes list from the Great Goddess Isister, I ran immediately to this place. That was the reason why I became out of breath.

While I casted the spell for the summoning ritual, I looked again at the status of my hero on the paper list. I was deeply moved. My eyes became burning hot again as I was about to cry.

Seiya's status had been reset. That probably meant that he lost all of his memories from the adventure he had with me...But, that was okay. I will have the chance to meet him again. That was enough for me...

On that moment, I read the name of my summoned hero.

Soon, a light burst from the magical chart, and the chosen hero was summoned from the earthly world.

He was handsomely tall, with glossy black hair and a dignified appearance. An aura emanated from his body as if he was a male god. I wondered if he was relaxing on his own room back on his original world. Ryuguuin Seiya had on casual and comfortable black clothes that he probably wore at his home.

I thought that I would never meet the hero again. I'd never have imagined that we'd be reunited through this way once more.

...Seiya...!

I desperately suppressed my unconscious stretching hands.

No! You can't, Listarte! I must be firm! Seiya no longer remembers about me!

While speaking to myself, I stretched my spine and I made a big smile on my face. I managed to retain my dignified goddess-like appearance while I looked at Seiya once again.

Let's start from the beginning all over again. We have to take our time slowly. Right...Seiya.

And then. I spoke exactly the same words as when I first summoned Seiya.

「Nice to meet you. I am Listarte. I am a goddess living on the God's realm. I summoned you from your earthly world to this dimension. Listen carefully, Ryuguuin Seiya. You will be the brave hero that will save the world "Exfolia" from the evil threats. 」

There was an obvious silent after I spoke. Suddenly, Seiya, who was summoned from the earthly world, looked at me with suspicious eyes. For me, this nostalgic scene felt like a déjà vu.

Seiya finally opened his mouth.

「Lista. What are you talking about? 」

「...Eh? 」

Wha...What? Wait a second! Eh? Did he call me Lista? Ah? Why?

「I've heard exactly the same words before. Is that supposed to be a standard quote whenever you summon a hero?」

Wha...Wha, wha, wha...What...!!

「Do you...remember me...? 」

「Of course. I don't suffer from amnesia as far as I can tell. 」

「Un...Unbelievable...!! That's...impossible...!! 」

「I'm telling the truth. I don't have amnesia. 」

「No, I'm not talking about amnesia!! How...How do you remember!? I mean, when a god summons a hero, the memory of the previous world should disappear...!! 」

「I don't know. I just remember. 」

Suddenly, I recalled the conversation I had with the Great Goddess Isister. I remembered the words she mentioned earlier. The Great Goddess Isister certainly said this.

『This is a special case. 』

In...In other words...the Great Goddess Isister left Seiya's memories intact...!? That...That was the only plausible reason to explain this!! What a great reversal!!

I was so touched because I trembled all over my body with excitement...

「By the way, my status was reboot onto my original one. After all the trouble I had in order to increase it and, then, this happens. This is stupid. Your system is not good at all. 」

Seiya looked dissatisfied as he continued to complain...This was so like Seiya...Seeing how my hero behaved as usual, the urge I had suppressed deeply inside me exploded as if something broke apart from pressure.

「*shouts and cries* Seiya!! *screams* I missed you so much!! 」

I threw away my goddess-like attitude and I jumped right into Seiya. I hugged him, and cried on his chest.

「I thought that your soul was destroyed during that time!! I thought I'd never see you again!! I tried to be strong in front of everyone else!! But, it was so hard and painful!!」

After a lot of crying, I took my face away from his chest. And then...

「Ah...! 」

There were lots of watery marks on Seiya's clothes because of my tears. No, not only tears. My runny nose also stained Seiya's clothes. And my mouth...my drooling too.

Oh no!! This was bad!! I forgot for a second that I was supposed to behave properly!! He will beat me for sure!!

I tried to cover my head with my hands straightaway, but Seiya didn't beat me.

「What? Are...you not angry with me? But, I stained your clothes, you know? 」

「I don't care about that. 」

「Eh? You don't? Wh...Why? 」

「...Lista. 」

Seiya stared at me with a serious face.

「I remember that you tried to help me desperately. Right before I died because of the price I had to pay for using the heavenly gate, I remembered that you were someone important to me from a different past.」

「Im...Important? 」

「That's right. 」

「Important...Are you referring...to me...? 」

「Yes. Someone important. 」

「Am I...an important existence...to you, Seiya? 」

「You're right. Don't let me repeat it again. This time I came for you. I heard the voice of Isister on my head, saying that you were in charge of a more difficult world than Geabrande as the punishment for saving me.」

「I...I see...You know, well. Excuse me. Could you wait for a moment... 」

I turned my face away because I didn't want Seiya to stare at me directly.

Whoa!! Wha...What was this!? What's up with this sudden development!?

The hell on heaven! Despair on a summit! An unspeakable sense of blissfulness attacked my heart! But...I still shook my head in denial.

No, wait a minute!! I would be an idiot if I were to fall for his words!! That's right!! It was Seiya we're talking about!! He will kick me all of a sudden if I let my guard down!! As if I'll fall for this!!

I approached Seiya while my heart was pounding rapidly...

「I...I apologize...! 」

I tried to wrap my arms around Seiya's arms casually. There was no change on Seiya's stoic expression, he was silent, but he didn't attack me.

This couldn't be!! Why wasn't he upset with me!? This...This was definitely a sign of...wait, no, not yet!! I should verify this further!!

With our arms entangled, I looked up at Seiya with keen eyes.

「Listen, Seiya. When we have free time, let's go see Mash and Elle, all right? You know, both of them wanted to try the hot springs, is it okay with you? 」

I was expecting him to say "I don't know" or "I refuse", but Seiya answered me immediately.

「You're right. 」

Instead, I received the phrase "you're right"!!

「I also caused lots of trouble for those two. If it's possible, I would like to meet them as soon as possible.」

There...There was no doubt about it!! Fi...Finally...Finally...

Inside my heart, I could feel a fireworks display that bloomed into beautiful flowers.

Finally, a tsundere conquered it all!! Wait for me, Mash, Elle!! I'll teach you about the real power of love!!

「But, we have to leave that for later after completing this quest. This world is more difficult than Geabrande, right? I need to be better preparation for this.」

Soon, Seiya's eyes became sharp looking.

「I need to start my practice immediately. 」

「Eh!? So soon!? 」

「Yeah. I'll start with basic training as I did here once before. 」

Seiya stared at me with determination. I knew where this was going without being told. He wanted me to leave the summoning chamber.

「O...Okay. I understand. 」

He didn't change his preferences about practicing in unattractive places. Even so, I wanted to be more lovey-dovey with him...

Just as I did before, I made a simple bed and toilet with the power of a goddess' creative abilities. I handed a buzzer to Seiya like I always did.

「All right let me know when you're ready. 」

When I tried to go out with a slightly lonely face.

「Lista. 」

Seiya called me.

「I leave my meals up to you... 」

「...Yes!! 」

—

「Hey, hey, listen, listen, Aria!! You know what!? Seiya has become a very gentle man!! He didn't hit or kick me anymore!! He also didn't crush my milky breasts!! 」

「I...I feel glad for you. I'm pleased that everything worked out in the end...」

I was in the room of senior goddess Ariadoa. I told her everything that happened. I was so excited and happy. Aria smiled when she heard my story.

「It was thanks to Lady Isister that Seiya retained his memories. I'm sure she spoke with the innermost lawful gods of the heavens about your efforts, Lista. I also apologized to her for my rude behavior early on. Lista, you should properly thank her later. 」

After saying that, Aria wrinkled between her eyebrows abruptly.

「Hey...Lista? Are you listening? 」

「Yeah, yeah! I'm listening, I'm listening! You said I should thank the Great Goddess Isister, am I correct? I know that!」

「You...You know, Lista. You can't be serious. Do you understand me? The past is the past. You mustn't forget that Seiya is a human being. And you are a goddess now.」

「Ah! Not that again! I didn't forget about that! I understand it very well! 」

「Really? Do you really understand it? 」

Aria took a deep breath.

「I'm worried. Actually, I wanted to accompany you on this quest. Exfolia is a world that will bring you many painful memories. Even if you forgot about your human memories, I'm sure your soul will react the moment you arrive in there...」

Aria was seriously worried about me. I tried to lift up her mood.

「I'm fine, I'm fine! That's because I have a lovey-dovey darling by my side now! ...Oh, no! It's already time to go! I have to cook a meal for Seiya! See you, Aria! 」

「Li...Lista!? How about thanking Lady Isister!? 」

「Sorry! I'll visit her tomorrow! 」

I left Aria's room in a hurry. I ran straightaway to the kitchen of the God's realm. My relationship with Seiya was going so well. It was as if everything was too good to be true.

Chapter 52: Reunion and Change (2)

The next day, I made onigiri rice balls for Seiya's breakfast. While I headed back to the summoning chamber, I saw Celseus and Adenela standing in the hallway.

「Good morning, Celseus! Today, you have a nice muscular physique! Lady Adenela, the dark circles under your eyes are so lovely!」

I greeted them cheerfully. But, Adenela looked a bit surprised at me.

「I...I see a big change on you. Well...Well, they told me that Seiya is alive...I...I understand why you are this happy though...」

In fact, I've been feeling a bit of tension lately. To tell the truth, yesterday, I wanted to verify if Seiya did really change his personality. Therefore, I made a stew for his dinner and I took it with me. I got so nervous because it felt like I were feeding a beast. But, I gathered some courage and I gave a spoon from the stew onto Seiya's mouth.

『Se...Seiya! Say "ah"! Just try saying, "ah"! Okay? Here, "ah"! 』

...It felt a great tension within me as I said that. Seiya could beat me with his fist at any moment. Such negative thoughts made my head spin. However...Seiya put the spoon on his mouth. He quietly chew the food from the stew slowly and slowly.

『Is...Is it delicious? 』

『Yeah. It's good. 』

...That's what really happened yesterday. So, I made some onigiri today and I was going to take the food to Seiya. Maybe I'll try the 「say "ah"」 from now on. That's why I was feeling a bit of tension lately. I got anxious every time I met Seiya. But, I also grinned at myself every time I experienced a different change with Seiya.

While I was feeling happy, Celseus shrug his shoulders with opposite feelings.

「Ah...So, that hero returned. Maybe there will be a possibility that I'll be forced to practice with him...ah...」

「It's fine, Celseus! Seiya is much gentler than before! 』

「Eh! Is...Is that true!? 』

「That's right! We went through many ordeals in saving Geabrande! Maybe that's the reason why Seiya matured so much!」

「I...I see...! Hmm? Wait a second...! If I think carefully about it, he's probably weaker than me now because his status got reset! That's right! There's no need to be frightened anymore! *laughs crazily*」

Behind an eccentrically idiotic Celseus...

「You're in a good mood, Celseus.」

Seiya stood right behind him with his crossed arms.

screams

「Hey, Celseus. Just because I'm weaker than you now doesn't mean I can't improve. I'll catch up with you soon. I'll make sure you won't ever need to bake cakes again with our practice.」

「What...What are you talking about? Oh please, don't! There's no way I'll let you ride on my back again! Anyways, welcome back, Seiya! Thank you for everything you've done to save that world!」

I wondered where his idiotic eccentric mood went to. Celseus gave Seiya a handshake.

「Don't worry, Celseus. I'll give you short breaks. You can use that free time to bake your favorite cakes.」

「E...!! Re...Really!? You'll give me some spare time to bake my own cakes!?!」

「Of course. From now on, I shall respect your freedom more than our practice together.」

I whispered on Celseus' ear.

「See! Seiya is so gentle now!」

「Ah, yeah! Is that so! I see!」

However, Seiya spoke to Celseus in a bluntly way.

「It will be one-minute break per five hours. Sleeping time will be three hours once every three days. Okay?」

「Of course it's not okay!! Isn't that a deadly schedule!? The conditions are extremely bad!! How can a bake a cake during that time break!? I don't think I can even beat the eggs in a bowl on one minute!!」

A lamenting Celseus shook my shoulder as if he was weeping.

「He...He didn't become gentler at all!! He became tyrannical instead!!」

Wha...What? It was strange. I really thought he became gentler with people...

Adenela pushed Celseus out of her way and spoke with Seiya.

「Se...Se...Seiya. For...Forget about Celseus...Would...you like to...practice with me?」

I became jealous when I looked at Adenela. Her cheeks were rosy. Worse than that! She had the eyes of a girl deeply in love!

Eh!! How could she! She knew of my past life relationship with Seiya, didn't she!? Do...Don't tell me that her love obsession with Seiya was reborn after she met Seiya once again!?

My heart felt annoyed with her while I looked attentively at Seiya's upcoming reaction. But, Seiya was looking at Adenela with bored eyes.

「Hmm. Adenela, you're still creepy as ever. The more I look at you, the worse it feels.」

「Ye...Yeah...! Lo...Love you...! 」

He told her a terrible thing!! But, Adenela made a face that looked like she didn't deny what was said about herself!! What...What on earth just happened right now!? Seiya behaved so harshly with Adenela...!!

Then, Seiya looked at me and loosened his cold face a little bit.

「By the way, Lista. I thought of something great. I'll train with both Celseus and Adenela at the same time. This will save us a lot of time.」

Celseus was startled with that suggestion. Even so, I nodded with a smile.

「You...You're probably right! That's a good idea! 」

On that moment, Seiya began to walk away. Before leaving, he looked one more time at me.

「Lista. Call me when you finish preparing my meal. I'll eat in your room today. Is that all right with you?」

「Of...Of course!! No problem at all!! 」

Seiya dragged an unpleasant Celseus with him and Adenela followed them closely behind. I became alone while they went to the summoning chamber to practice.

I see. Seiya...was only gentle with me...!! *laughs timidly* I could feel a tiny sense of superiority now...!! Well, but...that was obvious, I think!! Because Seiya and I were tied with a red thread from our previous life!! Moreover, we joined forces together to defeat the Demon King from Geabrande...It was natural for us to be this lovey-dovey together!! That's right!!

—

A few hours later. Seiya really came to my room.

I gave him the food I made with so much affection.

「Is the onigiri delicious? 」

「Yeah. It's good. 」

「How about the salad? 」

「Yeah. It's good. 」

This was bad...!! I felt extremely happy...!! No matter what he ate, Seiya only said 「Yeah. It's good. 」
...But, I felt so happy anyways...!!

I looked carefully at Seiya's profile while he ate my homemade food. My heart was beating so much faster than usual.

It...It would be too pushy if I tried to kiss him now, right? Sh...Should I try it!? I couldn't kiss him during that time, maybe I could do it now!? It shouldn't be a problem with a gentler Seiya, right!? *grins happily*

However, the door opened suddenly. Adenela entered my room without knocking.

「Se...Seiya! Ce...Celseus ran...ran away once...again! 」

「I see. I'm coming. We have to find him and punish him. A lot. 」

Just as I contemplated about a romantic scene with Seiya, he got up and went out with Adenela.

Ah, I couldn't kiss him again. But...well, it's all right! There's no need to rush things now! Once his training is complete...we'll be alone in Exfolia! There will be plenty of opportunities! Okay! I really wanted to go to Exfolia right now! Be it SS-rank or SSS-rank, I didn't care! Because I got to be with my favorite Seiya! We shall dive together in love!

...That's right. I felt that I was on the peak of my happiness when I grasped the reality of my current situation. However, my situation didn't last that long. On the contrary, my thoughts would be severely torn apart and completely destroyed later on.

Chapter 53: Invasion

The day after Seiya started his training with Adenela. Suddenly, I remembered that I didn't thank the Great Goddess Isister yet, so I went to her room in a hurry.

I knocked and slowly opened the door. I lowered my head as I entered inside.

「I apologize, Great Goddess Isister! I came too late to thank you properly...」

「Not at all. It's all right. 」

As expected, the Great Goddess Isister didn't scold me for being this late. She was sitting in a wooden chair. As usual, she knitted with a gentle smile on her face.

「I left your summoned hero the memory intact...This is the least I can do to support you. Lista, the rest will be in your hands. I entrust that world to you and Ryuguuin Seiya. 」

「Thank you very much!! 」

When I expressed my gratitude from the bottom of my heart, the Great Goddess Isister stopped knitting and stared at my face.

「To be honest, I'd do anything I could to help you two, but...I can feel a veil of mist inside my mind every time I try to think about Exfolia. I won't be able to see the near future of that world. Geabrande's Demon King also had the magical power to prevent the usage of my foreknowledge ability. However, that type of power is much greater now. 」

The Great Goddess Isister hardened her face a little.

「The Demon King, who defeated the hero and destroyed the world, benefited from the devilish dimension. It means that not only the Demon King, but all the other demons living in Exfolia increased their powers dramatically. They are so indomitable now that they can't be compared with demons from other worlds. In addition, you won't be able to use your healing abilities on Exfolia. It's easy to imagine that it will be a very tough fight to win. Still... 」

「It will be okay because I have Seiya!! 」

I interrupted the middle of the conversation with that proud declaration. The Great Goddess Isister laughed at my blunt enthusiasm, by saying 「I see, I see 」 .

「You're right. Because of the regrets from his past, Ryuguuin Seiya became a rare hero that combines his physical strength with his mental strength. Even so, that child also has a weakness. The speed of his growth increases dramatically every time he trains. That can represent both an advantage and a disadvantage. Just like what happened in Geabrande, he will experience a limitation on his ability. Even so, that child can save Exfolia if he overcomes that hurdle...I believe in him just like you.」

The Great Goddess Isister showed me a loving smile.

「Lista. This time it's a SS-rank difficulty world. Ryuguuin Seiya is allowed to train in the God's realm until he is fully prepared to go.」

I deeply lowered my head to show some respect for the Great Goddess Isister's kindness. After that, I left her room.

—

I got deeply engrossed with my thoughts after I spoke with the Great Goddess Isister. Just because Seiya became gentler, that didn't mean he got stronger. I won't be able to use my healing abilities this time. That's why I thought about learning something else to replace it. But what? I really wanted to help my beloved Seiya. Therefore, I began to think about finding a solution.

In the meantime, I asked Aria about Exfolia. I began to research about that world while Seiya was practicing. For me, it was a world of lost memories. But, for Aria, it was a world that left a bad printing mark on her heart. It was hard to hear about a world that wasn't saved. But, it was an inevitable path for me. Learning new information could help me save that world.

At first, Aria was reluctant to talk about it. However, she got some courage and, soon, she began to explain.

「Lista. You know, I...to tell you the truth, sometimes I get worried about Exfolia, so I look at the crystal ball to see the world...」

Aria told to me that the crystal ball showed that Exfolia became disastrous. Exfolia was completely under the rule of the Demon King. Currently, almost the entire world is governed by the powers of the devil forces. In addition, the remaining humans became slaves and livestock...She said that they were used even as toys and food.

「Lady Isister managed to break through the power of the Demon King for a brief moment. She was able to find a way for you to arrive on that world. The place chosen as your starting point will be on a town named "Galvano". The town is in charge of trading obedient slaves. So, the people of that town live relatively well. I suppose I could say they live well because they aren't used as toys or food for demons though...」

「So, that town will be the starting point. 」

I nodded as I took some notes. I noticed that Aria was looking at me with firm eyes.

「You're very enthusiastic. At first, I wondered what to do about all of this...But, I'm relieved to see that you're trying your best.」

「Yes. I also want to be useful to Seiya. 」

Aria put her hand on her chin. She tried to think about something that would be important for me. She hit her hand lightly on the table as if she had a flash.

「That's right, Lista! I'll teach you the "Appraisal" skill! It is the power to grasp the state of tools and equipment!」

「Appraisal? I wonder if that skill is somehow useful... 」

「Exfolia is a world ruled by the Demon King, but just like an ordinary world, you will be able to find weaponry and tool shops managed by human beings. They have no choice but to make weapons and tools themselves if they want to survive. The Appraisal skill will be extremely useful.」

At first, I was worried about learning a new skill. But, once I got the hang of it, it was no longer difficult to understand the usage of that skill. I could look at a specific target and use the skill to see the status of that object. Two days later, I fully mastered the Appraisal skill.

I tried to verify the status of a vase that was in Aria's room as a final trial.

『Vase...Container for inserting flowers. This particular vase is made of rare ceramics found in the God's realm. It is an expensive relic. It will sell for a good amount.』

Such words floated on my mind.

Okay! This skill was like a game the people from Seiya's world seemed to play! This was a bit interesting!

「You can adjust the details of this ability according to your style. In other words, it means that you can customize the Appraisal skill to your liking...」

—

...Oh my!! I wonder if Seiya will praise me!?

After leaving Aria's room, I went to the summoning chamber to meet Seiya. When I arrived, I noticed that the doors were open. I saw a fallen Celseus on the floor. Next to him, Seiya was swinging a wooden sword against Adenela. Seiya was sweating like a waterfall.

「It's you, Lista. 」

Seiya stopped his training when he spotted me.

「Ah, so...sorry! I distracted you while you were training, right? 」

「No. I don't mind. 」

Ah...He was gentle with me as usual...!

「You know what! Aria taught me the Appraisal skill! I can identity the properties of weapons and tools now!」

「That will help us. You worked hard. 」

He praised me. My mind was put at ease. It felt really good to know that I did my best!

And suddenly, I came up with an idea.

...I...I wondered if this skill would work if I directed it at Seiya?

I secretly activated the Appraisal skill on Seiya. I thought the following words... 『Please reflect Seiya's appraisal information, the one I would want to know the most. 』

Then, the following information appeared on mind.

★Lista's Heart-Throbbing Love Appraisal★

◎What is the degree of affection between you and him? 『90 points 』

◎What do you represent for him? 『Precious existence 』

◎Word of Advice! 『You'll be reaching your goal if you keep going like this!! Do your best!!』

Whoa!! This Appraisal skill was amazing!! 90 points!! That was already a stage of love!! Moreover, I'll reach my goal if I keep going like this!? My own subconscious gave an advice for myself!? I...I didn't understand how, but...Anyways. This Appraisal skill was way too awesome!!

Seiya noticed my gaze and twisted his head.

「Hmm? What's wrong? 」

「It...It's nothing! *grins* 」

「You probably want to see my status, am I right? 」

「Ah, yes. I want to see your current value, but... 」

I remember the last time I tried to see his status but I failed completely. Seiya was extremely reluctant to show me his status because he feared the information could leak. He probably hid his status with his camouflage skill once again...

「I won't mind showing my status if it's for you, Lista. 」

YES!! I will be reaching my goal very soon!! Nothing mattered to me anymore!!

I activated my clairvoyance ability to have a glimpse of Seiya's status without the protection of his camouflage skill...

Ryuguuin Seiya

Level – 51

HP – 145683

MP – 25622

Attack – 72888

Defense – 67693

Agility – 65007

Magic – 28765

Potential – 669

Resistance – Fire, Ice, Wind, Water, Lightening, Earth, Poison, Paralysis, Sleep, Curse, Instant Death, Abnormal Condition

Special skills – Fire magic (Lv MAX), Burst Magic (Lv 8), Magic Sword (Lv 9), Experience Gain Increased (Lv 15), Ability perception (Lv 18), Camouflage (Lv 20), Synthesis (Lv 7)

Skills – Hell's Fire, Maximum Inferno, Phoenix Drive, Phoenix Thrust, Eternal Sword

Personality – Unbelievably Cautious

「Al...Already that much....!! 」

His attack power was over 70,000 and the HP was nearly 150,000. With this status, he would be able to save a world with a C-rank difficulty quite easily. But, he won't be able to do the same for the upcoming SS-rank difficulty world. Yet, I thought his value was good enough for a starting point in Exfolia. Still, Seiya shook his head negatively.

「Not enough. I want to increase my ability value to a level that I can, at least, surpass the power of the once Dragon Mother.」

「That...That means you have to increase your level to MAX! 」

「Yeah. But, the problem is afterwards. If can't break through the limit of my status, I won't be able to save Exfolia just like the time I failed to protect it.」

It seemed that Seiya had the same worries as the Great Goddess Isister. In order to exceed the limit, he must increase his level to the maximum power of his own ability. It was natural that Seiya was aiming to reach his MAX level.

「By the way, where is your special skill of Flight? Also, I didn't see your other skills such as the Atomic Split Slash and Wind Blade on your status previously. Why don't you have them? But, I remember that those skills appeared even when your status was lower than now. 」

「The skills and techniques change according to the standards of each world. It seems that Exfolia is a world where I can't learn the Flight skill. Besides, the magic system looks a lot more fragmented than in Geabrande. I will only be able to use Fire Magic this time.」

「That's troublesome. 」

「Yeah. That's why Exfolia was named a SS-rank difficulty world. But, on the contrary, this is not Geabrande we're talking about, meaning there will be specific skills and techniques that I can obtain in Exfolia.」

After we finished talking, Seiya resumed his training with Adenela. Unlike Celseus, Adenela was quite tough. She showed no signs of exhaustion. She kept swinging her sword repeatedly with Seiya.

I began to worry again after I saw such sight. I would like to do something more meaningful for Seiya than just the Appraisal skill.

...That's it!

Suddenly, an idea came to my mind. I thought that it would be better to adjust the portal in order to start from an ideal position.

We'll go to this world for the first time on our current lives. As a lower goddess in experience and power, I won't be able to position our location correctly once I summon the portal without time to prepare. That's why it would be a good idea to do it beforehand. I casted a spell far away from Seiya and the portal to Exfolia appeared right in front of my eyes.

On that moment, Seiya turned to me abruptly.

「Hey, Lista. What are you doing? I told you I was not ready yet, right? 」

「Ah, do you mean the portal? I'm adjusting it! I want to put the portal into a safer position! If I have enough time to adjust the portal, then we will be able to arrive in a secure area of the town we're supposed to go!」

「I'm happy that you're preparing this much, but...are you sure that monsters won't be able to use the portal to come here?」

「Don't worry! I invoked a strong barrier! It's absolutely fine! 」

However...

weird sound

The portal opened and a strange sound was heard from the inside.

...What.

I was completely dumbfounded. I watched petrified, as the doors of the portal were opened automatically.

At the portal, stood a beast man with a face of a wolf. The monster had a muscular body covered with silver hair. His sudden appearance on the God's realm was so natural that it was as if a roommate entered his own room without hesitating.

「Nice to meet you, goddess of another dimension. And, goodbye. 」

His voice was one of a human, but his appearance was of a beast. Soon, I felt my life in danger as the sharp fangs of the werewolf were about to slice my own neck.

Chapter 54: Discomfort

In the summoning chamber there was the Swordsman God and the Goddess of War, by the doors of the chamber stood two of the Martial Arts Gods that guarded the temple. But, just like me, their minds froze at the sight of such an unexpected situation... Everything had happened so suddenly, that I was perplexed.

I closed my eyes instinctively when the werewolf monster tried to attack me. I heard a dull sound while my field of vision was pitch dark. At the same time, I felt a violent shock and I fell on the floor. But, it was strange. I felt the impact on my shoulders instead of my neck.

When I opened my eyes, I noticed that Seiya covered me like a shield. That's right...Seiya was always the one who reacted the quickest according to each situation. He protected me so fast that the evil fangs didn't get close to my neck.

「Seiya!! 」

However, Seiya didn't move an inch while he leaned against me. It was as if he passed out.

...Don't tell me that Seiya received the fangs attack in my place!?

I didn't see any bleeding at first glance. I tried to confirm if he was truly safe from external injuries, however, a cold voice echoed above my head.

「Is that the summoned hero for Exfolia? 」

The werewolf's eyes looked at us suspiciously. Soon, the werewolf emanated a strong black aura from his sharp claws as he lifted his arms. At first, I was his aim, but at this precise moment, a new target replaced me. My instinct told me something alarming about this menacing power. I had the same exact feeling as when the Warlord Emperor aimed at me with his God Eater. This was also identical to the aura created inside the Devil's Castle in Geabrande. I couldn't forget this awful feeling...

...The Chain Destruction...!!

「...Die. 」

With that cold voice, the werewolf charged directly at Seiya with his deadly claws!

...Do...Don't...!!

This time, however, I made a resolution as I put myself in front of Seiya to protect him. Celseus, who saw us being attacked by the werewolf, got frightened...

screams

I could hear his voice engulfed in fear.

I was prepared to die eternally because my soul was about to be destroyed completely...And yet, on that moment, a piercing sound from a metal clash reverberated on my earlobes.

The claws of the werewolf didn't reach me nor Seiya. When I looked up, I saw that Adenela stood in front of us earnestly. She protected us from the claws of the werewolf by using her sword as a shield.

「E...Enemy...! 」

The werewolf distanced himself when he noticed her defensive pose. He licked his own claws with his tongue then.

「So, you are a goddess too. That means you're my enemy as well. 」

On that moment, the claws of the werewolf extended in size. His claws became the size of big daggers. He aimed those pointy weapons to Adenela, who stood in front of Seiya and I.

「...Slash Disorder. 」

On the other hand, Adenela focused on defeating that monster. 「Disappear. Disappear 」, she said. I could hear a sound coming from her blade.

「The...The true consecutive gunshot sword...! 」

Adenela pointed the tip of her sword on the werewolf's direction. I shouted to Adenela.

「Lady Adenela! Watch out! That monster's claws were activated with the Chain Destruction! A mortal wound would destroy your soul forever! 」

Celseus responded instead of Adenela.

「Eh!? In other words, we'll die for real if we get a mortal injury!? That...That can't be true, right!? Because, gods can't die permanently, you know!? 」

「That's why I tried to explain! Gods will really die if they are killed by that power!! 」

「What!? You're joking, right!? I don't want to die yet!! 」

In contrast to the seemingly overwhelmed Swordsman God, Adenela, the Goddess of War, laughed insanely.

「*laughs weirdly* A...A fight that puts my life on the line...I...I won't find anything more interesting than...this...!」

She acted without hesitating, just like a carnivore ready to attack its prey. She jumped like a predator towards her enemy immediately, while holding the consecutive gunshot sword in motion! She held her sword in one hand, and attacked repeatedly at a tremendous speed that created an illusionary image of

several swords! Her fierce attack reminded me of the one that Seiya used with his own consecutive gunshot sword!

However...I couldn't believe it! The werewolf was defending himself from her sword attacks by using his claws! Soon, his claws became deformed on both hands! This intense battle reminded me of attacks between Seiya and the Warlord Emperor back in Geabrande! Likewise, their battle also scattered sparks everywhere!

And then...A dull sound was heard as if the meat was ripped apart! Before I realized it, Adenela fell behind and held her stomach with her hand! Fresh blood was dripping from between her fingers!

「Lady Adenela!? 」

「Im...Impossible!! My...My consecutive gunshot sword, as the Goddess of War, was defeated!? What...What the hell is that monster!? 」

Adenela was looking at the werewolf with an astonishing expression. She told us then.

「Don't...Don't worry...It's...It's...just a scratch... 」

On the other hand, it looked like Adenela injured the werewolf as well. There was a little black blood dripping from a cut on his cheek. However, it was obvious that Adenela was the one who got injured the most.

It was unbearable for me to watch this hopeless situation. Therefore, I ran in Celseus' direction.

「Ce...Celseus! Lady Valkyrie! Go get Lady Valkyrie! 」

「Ye...Yeah! Understood! 」

When Celseus tried to leave hurryingly...

「It...It's not necessary. 」

Adenela mumbled with a fierce voice.

「This...This is different from when I battled the god of death. Phy...Physical attacks are...are effective against this...monster. There...There's no...nothing to worry about. 」

Abruptly. Adenela opened her mouth widely and raised her voice.

「O...O...Order...! 」

I heard a strange sound! Adenela's right arm made a weird sound and, at the same time, it twisted dramatically! Her arm was mutilated!

「Whoa!! Her...Her arm!! What happened!? That's scary and creepy!! It's way too creepy!! 」

Celseus hid behind me in fear. I distracted myself with Celseus. When I looked at Adenela again, I noticed that her arm was no longer an arm. Adenela's arm transformed into a shining silver blade.

Adenela raised both corners of her mouth in an amusing way.

「*laughs weirdly* Divine sword..."Gliding Eagle"...! 」

I swallowed up my own saliva.

「She...She changed her arm into a sword...? 」

Adenela positioned in a cat stance. While swinging the arm that became a sword, she jumped to attack the defenseless werewolf.

Then...she screamed.

「Ex...Extreme consecutive gunshot sword...! 」

A huge illusionary storm ran towards the werewolf in maximum speed! The slashing was done at an insane precipitation.

「Ugh... 」

The werewolf's expression was greatly distorted!

Usually, the consecutive gunshot sword was a high-speed technique that was made by countless slashes from down below, above, backwards, forward, with a mix of raveling, stabbing, and so on. However, the speed increased dramatically with the newly consecutive gunshot sword. Yet, this sword technique specialized only in stabbing. But, her right arm, the divine sword "Gliding Eagle", was narrow with a sharp edge. The silver blade seemed suitable for the countless stabbing movements of the consecutive gunshot sword.

It was impossible for the werewolf to prevent the massive stabbing strikes. He used his claws as a shield but the power of that blade was too strong. He couldn't dodge the attacks. Lots of scars and deep wounds were inflicted severely on his body from the continued stabbing.

The werewolf moved sideways in a hurry to avoid being hit. But, just as he fled away, the "Gliding Eagle" became a whip-like object! On that precise moment, the right arm of the werewolf was disconnected from his body!

「Ahhh! 」

The werewolf screamed in pain. Black blood was dripping like crazy from his severed arm.

「The...The infinite stabbing has...has enough power to...kill my enemies easily. That's the...Divine sword..."Gliding Eagle".」

...Amazing...! This was Adenela's true power...!

The situation had reversed in our favor. The werewolf, who just lost his right arm, managed to sneak behind Adenela and got away.

「Wha...! 」

With a sticking tongue, the werewolf ran extremely fast as he went straightway to the portal. He wanted to get away by returning from where he came from.

「That...That monster is running away!! 」

When Celseus yelled, the werewolf turned around and grinned.

「Well, fine anyways. I already left a mark... 」

...Ma...Mark, he said? What does that mean?

「He...He is trying to escape... 」

Adenela rushed towards the werewolf. She charged at a tremendous speed and changed her left arm simultaneously! With a harsh sound, her left arm transformed into an extensive Japanese sword longer than the Gliding Eagle!

「Di...Divine sword..."Recurrence Swallow"...! 」

Adenela looked like a demon!

「*laughs weirdly* Do...Double consecutive gunshot sword...! 」

She transformed both of her arms into swords and jumped behind the escaping werewolf! The face of the werewolf got caught by the arms of the Goddess of War who came in flying in the air!

「Di...Di...Di...Di...Die...! 」

「Wa...Wait, Lady Adenela!! Maybe we can extract some information about Exfolia from that monster...」

But, my words were not heard at all! She made consecutive slashes with her left arm and several fast punctures with her right arm!

laughs insanely high

The werewolf was chopped and aggressively pierced! Tons of black blood covered the entire space of the summoning chamber!

...The "Double consecutive gunshot sword"...! Adenela's strength was not be underestimated! Her fierce combat style was truly terrifying when she "Order" her arms to transform into two devilish Divine Swords...!

The blood from the demon was scattered everywhere. A tiny fraction of that black blood fell on Celseus' cheek, who stood quite far in the distance.

「Whoa!? I...I can't take this anymore!! I want to go back to my room and have a cup of warm chamomile tea!!」

While Celseus screamed desperately, the brutal murder did not stop. It was too ruthless that I didn't think I would ever see such scenario inside the God's realm. In just a few seconds, the werewolf turned into a limbless mass of flesh.

laughs cruelly

Adenela was fully bathed in blood. Then, she looked around and stared at me. I was completely frightened. Moreover, she stared at Celseus too, who was in a state of absolute despair...

「...Ah. 」

She showed me a face that looked like she finally returned to normality. I looked behind her and I noticed that the body of werewolf demon had been violently slaughtered...

「You...You really killed it... 」

I spoke with a disappointing tone. Both of her deformed swords returned to her original arms. She pointed with her fingers at my knees where Seiya was laying unconsciously.

「Is...Is...Se...Seiya...safe? 」

「Yes...I don't see any injury on his body, but... 」

I didn't any cuts on Seiya's body by the werewolf's claws. But, then why?

『I already left a mark. 』

Don't tell me that the werewolf declared those words just as an act of anguish?

It can't be...!

I shook a fainted Seiya desperately.

「Se...Seiya!! Seiya, wake up!! 」

But, my anxiety was groundless.

「Ugh... 」

With a hand on his head, Seiya raised his upper body slowly.

「I'm glad!! Are you okay!? 」

「Yeah. I'm fine. But, I feel a little discomfort inside my head... 」

「I...I see! Then, don't overdo it! You can lay down for a while, okay? 」

「No. More importantly. What happened to that werewolf? 」

「Ah...About that, you know...Lady Adenela took care of it... 」

「...What did you say? 」

Seiya turned his gaze to the werewolf who became an unspeakable limbless mass of flesh and wrinkled his forehead. On the other hand, Adenela, whose insanity had just gone like the wind, was standing beside Seiya like a little girl who had broken a vase. Adenela knew Seiya's personality. The enemy was slaughtered mercilessly without obtaining crucial information about the upcoming world. She felt that Seiya would reprimand her.

「I'm...I'm sorry... 」

He approached Adenela, who had just apologized to him. Then, he spoke to her with unexpected kind words.

「No, you did well. That had to be done in order to defeat it. Thanks. 」

「Se...Seiya...! Lo...Love you...! I like you too much...! 」

Soon, Adenela's dark circled eyes disappeared completely and transformed into the shining eyes of a girl deeply in love. Just when Adenela switched to her passionate maiden mode, I interrupted them because I found it too troublesome...

「Anyways, let's report this to the Great Goddess Isister!! It's unbelievable to know that the first enemy we encountered had the power of the Chain Destruction!!」

I raised my voice. Next to me, Celseus nodded in silence.

Seiya stared at Celseus and asked the following...

「Can I ask you to do that on my behalf? I have something else to do. 」

...Ah...I was sure that he would like to burn the remains of the werewolf with Hell's Fire...

I thought that the ritual of cleaning up was beginning once again. However, Seiya grabbed my arm and pulled it.

Eh!? Wha...What!? Don't...Don't tell me that he was angry with me!? Yes, that must be it!! The werewolf came out because I was the one who opened the portal!! It was my fault that that happened!! This...This was bad!! There will be a crack on the love I cherished and nurtured with so much effort!!

But, that was a needless worry. Seiya was not angry with me. However, he pulled my arms strongly and walked as if he was in a hurry.

「C'mon, this way. Let's go to Exfolia. 」

I was surprised by his sudden words.

「Eh!? What about cleaning up!? Besides, didn't you say you still had lots of training to do!?」

「It's enough. 」

「Wa...Wait, Seiya!? 」

Seiya dragged me down while he headed to the portal that led to Exfolia.

Both Celseus and Adenela looked attentively at the hasty action of Seiya.

...But, if it was the cautious Seiya we're talking about...Maybe, his level is above 50... So, there shouldn't be a problem...right?

When we arrived at the portal, Seiya put his hands on the door and said.

「Let's go now, Lady Goddess. 」

「La...Lady Goddess!? Are you talking about me!? 」

「We have to save the world soon. Precious lives will be lost if we wait too long.」

I felt a sense of strangeness when I heard the words that were incompatible with Seiya's cautious personality. I stared attentively at the hero that went through the portal hurriedly.

「Se...Seiya!? Are you sure it's really okay to go now!? You are Perfectly Ready, right!?」

「Yeah. Of course... 」

The hero didn't look at me. Instead, he uttered the following words as he looked ahead without hesitating.

「Gonna be Okay. 」

Chapter 55: Recklessness (1)

When I arrived from the portal, I noticed that I was in a dark room, the walls were made of old wood, and there were cracks everywhere and there was a small window without glass. This could've been a spacious place for four or five people to live in. But, everything was worn-out. The floor had cracks and holes, and the furniture, such as a table and chairs, were smashed. It looked like an abandoned house.

I'd like to observe it more closely, but before that, there was something I was worried about.

I asked the hero who stood my side in this dark room.

「Hey, Seiya! You called me "Lady Goddess" a moment ago, am I right? And, instead of "Perfectly Ready", you said "Gonna be Okay"? Why? 」

That was Seiya's favorite phrase before he met me. It was something from his past. I remember hearing about it several times on the crystal ball of the Great Goddess Isister. I felt some anxiety swirling up on my heart.

「Well, maybe it's just me imagining things, but...you remember me, don't you?」

「You are the Lady Goddess in charge of me. I was summoned as a hero to save this world named Exfolia, correct?」

「I...I suppose so, yes. But...my name! What's my name? Can you tell me? 」

「I think it was..."Misotarte", am I wrong? 」

「It's Listarte!! There's no way I'm called a miso tart!! Well, then...Do you remember anything about Geabrande!?」

「Geabrande!? I've never heard of it. 」

The purpose of a hero's quest was not forgotten! He recognized me as a goddess as well! Bu...But, what...what about the rest...!

He won't be able to answer my questions if he remains like this. Therefore, I activated my clairvoyance ability to see Seiya's current status.

Ryuguuin Seiya

Level – 51

HP – 90854 / 145683 ...

...His health points decreased a lot! That means that the werewolf's attack was successful!

However, I was even more amazed at an unfamiliar sentence that appeared under his health points.

«State: Big Confusion»

What... "Big Confusion"!? I see!! His consciousness was clouded!! That's why he had amnesia about his recent life events!!

But, the crucial part was the last information on his status: "Personality". So far, his personality stated as "Unbelievably Cautious", and now was...

Personality – Unbelievably Reckless

...it... it changed dramatically...

I was completely puzzled with all this. Of course, the only plausible way that came to my mind was the werewolf's last message. He said, "I already left a mark". In other words, the mark was responsible for this bewildering state. He gave an abnormal condition to the hero to and managed to severely reduce his health points... Was this the first time that I saw an abnormal condition such as this one!? Even if I had my healing abilities, I didn't know if it could be cured!! Ah, what should I do about this!? The Great Goddess Isister left his memory intact and we were so lovey-dovey with each other!! Why did this have to happen now...!!

Suddenly, I became quite concerned about the degree of affection that Seiya had for me. I activated my Appraisal skill of love.

★Lista's Heart-Throbbing Love Appraisal★

◎What is the degree of affection between you and him? 『40 points 』

◎What do you represent for him? 『Neither good nor bad existence 』

◎Word of Advice! 『Hmm. It seems that he doesn't think much about you. I wish he could get his memories back...』

「The degree of affection dropped considerably!! My existence is neither good nor bad!!」

Seiya became startled when he heard me scream aloud.

「Hey. What are you talking about? 」

「No...Nothing...I was talking to myself. You don't have to worry. It's all right...」

That...That's okay! All right! It will be all right! He'll be back if this confusion state is resolved! But, I didn't know how! Anyways, there should be a way to undo this, so we should retreat for now! We should go back to the God's realm and ask the Great Goddess Isister for help!

I held Seiya's hand.

「Seiya!! First, we need to return to the God's realm!! 」

「Why? We just got here. 」

「Just come with me. C'mon. 」

「I don't know what you mean. 」

Contrary to everything that happened so far, I became the one who wanted to return to the God's realm. I pulled Seiya's hand. I opened the portal once again, and when we stepped inside...

colliding sound

I hit my forehead against something solid!!

「It...It hurts!! 」

I shook my head. When I looked up, I saw a white wall made of concrete standing right in front of me.

「Wha...What's this!? Why is there a wall in the portal!? 」

I thought something was not right. Therefore, I made it disappear. A few seconds later, I invoked the portal once again, but the wall was still there.

「I...I can't return because of this wall!!! Why can't I go back from where I came from!? This is absolutely ridiculous!!」

What was the meaning of this! Ho...However, it was for moments like this that the Appraisal skill could be very useful!

I stared at the white wall while using my skill. Soon, words appeared slowly inside my mind.

『The Wall that blocks different dimensions...The magic powers of the Demon King were activated. The Wall won't disappear unless you defeat the invoker who's responsible for the magic device that's causing this phenomenon.』

I had customized the Appraisal skill to relay information by speaking to me. After hearing such the facts, I froze.

「It...It can't be...!! I won't be able to return to the God's realm!? This means that I have no choice but to save Exfolia in this hopeless and confusing state!?」

I was petrified by these horrifying events as if my soul left my own body. On the other hand, Seiya went to the broken window to have a glimpse of the outside.

「Hey, Lady Goddess. Come here. Just look at that. 」

I was a bit out of my mind. Even so, I walked towards his direction just as he told me to. I looked at the outside from the broken window.

The sky was purple. There were many collapsed buildings in the vicinity. The air was so dense that it hurt my nasal cavity. Galvano was supposed to be the perfect location for the start of our quest. But, all that I saw was destruction. It was unthinkable that this location was a safe starting zone. And then...I opened my eyes widely, a little ahead in the distance, I noticed two demon beasts walking around through this town! One had a dog's face, while the other had a cat's face! They held a couple of chains on their hands! They were taking naked humans that walked on four limbs like animals!

「Wh...Why on earth...That is...! 」

That was the opposite scenario of an ordinary world! The demon beasts seized the humans with chains and took them like pets!

Anyway, these were the first monsters I've seen in Exfolia since we've arrived here. I tried to activate my clairvoyance ability in a silent way. I had to be extremely careful or those two beastly men could find me.

Beast Man (dog type)

Level – 35

HP – 56274

MP – 0

Attack – 28754

Defense – 27895 ...

Beast Man (cat type)

Level – 37

HP – 58887

MP – 0

Attack – 30008

「...Eh! 」

My heart jumped greatly when I saw their status. It was beyond my imagination.

I...I see!! Perhaps, those two belong to the executive class!? Don't tell me that I have such bad luck, that I managed to find two sub-bosses so early on!!

However...

「Hey. I'm taking a sloppy little pet today as well. 」

「You're noisy. Just keep it in your house. At least, it's better than a dirty pet, meow.」

「By the way, I don't think they've been feed properly... This is not good. They're going to die at this rate.」

Soon, other demon beasts appeared! One had a bird face and the other looked like a boar! The beasts who understood the human language greeted one another on the street! In addition, I saw another group of beasts talking further away from the previous group! All of them were high-level! Their HP was over 50,000 and the attack power was at least 30,000!

「It...It can't be...!! All the enemies in this world have a strong status...!! 」

Not only that! Their numbers! I didn't notice before, but there were dozens of beasts just wandering around! There must be hundreds of beasts living in this town!

「Wha...What a horrible world...!! 」

My body trembled incessantly. Just when I tried to lean on Seiya...there was no hero next to me.

「...Ah!? 」

Seiya held his hand on the door of the abandoned house. I was astonished and terrified just by realizing what he was about to do; and on that moment, I screamed to him.

「Hey, wait!! What are you doing!? 」

Seiya responded in a calm manner.

「Of course, I'm going to fight. There's no way I'll stand still after I saw chained human beings being treated like pets. They have miserable lives because of those beasts. 」

「Wait a second, don't tell me that you are planning to fight them with your bare hands!?」

「What's wrong with my bare hands? 」

「It's bad!! This is not a bedtime story, you know!? This place was classified as a SS-rank difficulty world, got it!? Without proper equipment, you won't be able to fight against hundreds of high-leveled beasts!!」

I pulled Seiya out of the door and pushed him to the center of the room.

「Just calm down!! You are seriously injured too!! Stay still until your confusion subsides!!」

「I'm fine. I'm not confused. 」

「You don't even remember my name!! 」

「I've already memorized it. Your name is "Osutarte",* right? 」

「It's Listarte!! You don't remember it at all!! 」

I had a severe headache when I screamed. I swung my neck while holding my head to one side.

「...Listen, Seiya. You're not in your perfect condition right now because of that werewolf's attack. In addition to memory loss, your HP decreased to ninety thousand from your previous one hundred and forty thousand points. I want to cure you, but I won't be able to use my healing abilities this time. So, do you understand? Let's rest here for a while, okay?」

「I think my HP is quite enough for this...Oh boy, you are a very cautious goddess.」

Ugh!? It felt weird and revolting to hear such words from Seiya himself!!

However, it seemed that he gave up on leaving from the time being. After that, Seiya looked at the window in a seriously and busy manner.

「He...Hey. It's okay if you want to know more about what's happening outside. But, they will find us out if you lean too much on the window... 」

I had to be extremely careful around this type of hero. Eventually, Seiya changed his complexion. It seemed that he noticed something unusual.

「Hmm. A new beast man has appeared. 」

「Eh? 」

I got closer to the window to have a look at the situation.

Just as Seiya described, there was a new demon beast. This beast was quite large and his big arms were crossed in bossy style. He stood in front of a group of beasts who took the naked humans as pets.

He had a robust body. Twice the size of the other beasts. And he had a very ugly pig face. Unlike the other group of beasts, this newly pig beast was equipped with steel armor. When he moved to the side, I could see that he carried an axe weapon on his back.

This beast was clearly different from all the other beasts in the vicinity. He was staring attentively at both the beast man with a dog face and the beast man with a cat face.

「What the hell are you guys doing. I told you we have to cherish our slaves. Just look at them, the poor things. They are so skinny. Are you feeding them properly?」

The dog and cat beasts heard without saying a word to what the large pig beast had to say. Then, they lowered their heads in respect.

「I...I'm sorry, Lord Bunogeos. 」

「How often do you feed them? 」

「I...I only give them one meal a day... 」

「I also only give them one meal at night... 」

「You are idiots. You need to feed them three times a day. You need to bath them occasionally too. It's our duty to create good slaves for our great Demon King.」

Regardless of his grotesque appearance, he seemed to care more about humans than the other demon beasts. The other beasts showed him a respectful attitude. So, that meant that this large monster pig was higher in rank. At least, among the beast men. I was sure that his status was somewhat larger than the other beast men I have seen...However, I was speechless the moment I activated my clairvoyance ability.

Evil Beast Bunogeos

Level – 67

HP – 338547

MP – 0

Attack – 300019

Defense – 258344

Agility – 77777

Magic – 794

Potential rate – 674

Resistance – Fire, Water, Lightening, Ice, Earth, Light, Darkness, Poison, Paralysis, Instant Death, Sleep, Abnormal Condition

Special skills – Evil God Protection (Lv MAX), All Magical Attributes Reduction (Lv MAX)

Skills – God Chopper, Vacuum Shredder

Personality – Short-tempered

...How...How was that possible!! This beast had a similar status to that of the demon Warlord Emperor that Seiya won through a difficult battle!? In addition, "All Magical Attributes Reduction"! It means that magical attacks won't inflict any damage on this demon!! It...It's impossible!! Geabrande was no match for this type of world!!

...Everything's crazy!! We're doomed!!

Chapter 55: Recklessness (2)

The naked humans taken by the dog faced and cat faced beasts were men and women in their adult years. They looked filthy as if they were beggars. It seemed that they were treated with very cruelty. A human woman shed tears when the "gentle" beast appeared in front of her. Next to her, a human man clung to the beast.

「Ah, Lord Bunogeos! Thank you very much! Thank you very much! 」

The naked human man touched the foot of the pig-faced beast Bunogeos to say thank you. On that instant, the face of Bunogeos became stiff.

「...Touched me. 」

「Eh? 」

「...You...touched me. 」

Soon after, Bunogeos exposed his fangs and shouted extremely high!

「Dirty human being!! How dare you touch me, the noble Bunogeos, with those dirty hands that reek of feces!!」

He screamed even louder! Bunogeos raised his hand to his back and grabbed the large axe weapon! I could feel an ominous aura from that axe because it emitted dark magic!

「That...That's the Chain Destruction!! He also has a weapon capable of destroying my soul and Seiya's!?!」

I began to shiver in fear! Then, I could hear the slave beg for his mercy from outside the window!

「Forgive me! Forgive me! 」

Nonetheless, a red-faced Bunogeos was so full of rage that he didn't even hear the human speak! He mercilessly swung his axe and slashed the human man! Fresh blood was spilled everywhere as his body was separated in two!

The slave woman opened her mouth...

excruciating screams

The woman was so terrified that she hid under the feet of her master, the cat-faced beast.

Bunogeos returned to sanity after he heard the woman cry. He had a puzzled expression.

「Ah. I killed again. Well, I guess its fine. It was just a mere slave that was rotten.」

—

...At this precise moment, there was someone next to me shaking his body in anger after witnessing the horrible scene happen just outside of the window.

「What a bastard. I won't absolutely forgive him. 」

It was the hero. An angry face replaced his usual bored face. Seiya was trying to open the door in a hurry and with fury.

「Se...Seiya!? Calm down!! You're not behaving like you normally do!! 」

「A person was killed right in front of our eyes. How can you stay still as if nothing ever happened? 」

「That's why I stand still!! You'll get yourself killed if you go now!! That monster's status is slightly above than yours, you know that!? 」

「It's okay. I can do it. 」

「On what basis!? Just look at his status!! It will be pointless even with the fire magic that you're good at!!」

「I saw his status. That's why I have to go. 」

「...Eh. 」

「Lady Goddess. Have you noticed anything else about his status? 」

「Notice, you say? 」

Seiya squeezed his nose as usual.

「Listen. It is interesting that his agility is quite different compared to his other elements. 」

「In...Indeed, compared to his attack power and defense power, his agility is low. It's not bad to notice the enemy's strengths and weaknesses. But, even so, your agility is still 65,000. Your value still falls short compared to his, you know?」

「No. That's not what I'm trying to say. 」

Seiya's eyes were sharp looking. I breathed quietly as I listened to him.

That...That's right! Seiya had always defeated the formidable enemies by using strategies that were considered above the comprehension of ordinary minds! Just because I didn't see a way to win, that didn't mean that there wasn't a way out of this!

「Tell me, Seiya!! What kind of strategy do you have!? 」

Then, Seiya opened his mouth with confidence.

「The agility of that monster is 77,777. In other words, seven is the dominant number. And, seven is the number representing good fortune. 」

「...Ah? 」

「After knowing this...I was sure that I could do it! 」

「No, wait. Where did you get that stupid reasoning from!? If every person thought that reasoning was real, then nobody would have to die like this!!」

“I can win because it is a lucky number!”...That was a reasoning of a child in elementary grade. I was so amazed in a bad way that I almost cried. Still, the hero looked confident as he headed towards the door.

「Anyways. What that pig monster did was unforgiving. I should go and defeat him.」

「It's impossible!! You're going to die!! Listen to me!! He has a weapon that can destroy my soul and yours!! Normally, once a hero dies, he'll return to his original world!! But, if he kills you with that weapon you won't be able to return anymore, got it!? After knowing all of this, do you still want to go!?」

「What's wrong about that. Are you that afraid to die? People are born and, eventually, they die. Then, I would rather face my destiny and die honorably. Okay, I've decided. This is the place I've chosen to die.」

...This...This was surreal!! Strong courage combined with recklessness!! How...How should I stop him!?

However, Seiya was too focused and angry to fight against the Bunogeos that killed a human slave. He won't listen to me anymore. Therefore, I tried to stop him from opening that door.

「Stop right there!! 」

Somehow, I managed to grab his waist. Yet, he didn't stop walking ahead.

Ah!? Why was this happening!! This was absolutely the worst!! I miss my unbelievably cautious hero so much!!

「Please, stop, don't go!! I beg you!! 」

I couldn't handle this anymore. My crying voice started to shiver while tears fell down from my eyes. Seiya looked at me and became worried.

「What's wrong, Lady Goddess? Why are you crying?

「Be...Because...Seiya, you don't care about me...and you didn't...listen to anything I said...」

And then, Seiya scratched his head.

「I'm sorry. I gave you trouble. I think I got too disoriented. 」

Eh...? Se...Seiya...apologized to me?

Seiya sat down on the floor and his calm demeanor returned once again.

I...I see. There was something different about this new Seiya. He was gentle but reckless. While the Seiya I knew was cold but cautious...

While I was wiping my tears with my hands, Seiya bowed to me.

「I behaved careless. I'll do what you said to do. 」

「Yes. It's good that you finally understand. Thank you... 」

「Forgive me, Totokarucho.* 」

「I told you that my name is Listarte just moments ago!! Are you saying that on purpose!? Are you really!?!」

I was very emotional because I was upset and cried because of his stupid behavior. Suddenly, I heard a *knock knock* sound. I felt the shock wave coming from the floor...

screams

I shivered heavily!

「Wha...Wha...What was that!? 」

The sound came from the other side of the room! When I looked over, I noticed that the corner of the room was pushed up! Someone with tattered clothes came crawling from the floor!

「En...Enemy!? 」

Seiya stood against the figure that came out. I hid behind his back in fear. Nevertheless, it was someone that wore a tattered cape. He looked at us and took the hood from his head. It was the face of a grey-haired old man.

「Hurry up. This way. 」

The old man pointed to the floor from where he came out.

「There are no horrible beasts inside. C'mon...hurry up. 」

The old man rushed inside. But, I hesitated. There was no way I could easily trust the person who, suddenly, crawled out from floor.

Yet, Seiya went to the corner of the room without wavering.

「What a good man. Let's go. 」

「Wa...Wait, Seiya!? 」

I whispered on Seiya's ear.

「Don't you think this is a bit suspicious!? That person came out from under the floor, isn't it weird!? Isn't it right to doubt this a little!?!」

「It doesn't matter if he crawled out from under the floor, or if he jumped out from above the ceiling. How can I not trust a person when I'm a person myself!?!」

「Yes, but this is a SS-rank difficulty world... 」

「It's fine. Did you see that old man properly? He had very clear eyes. 」

It was certain that I didn't feel any evil aura coming out from that old man. But, even so...

I hesitated to go, but on that moment, the old man put a holy cross pendant over his tattered upper cloth.

「You don't have to worry. I am Luke. I am a priest of Galvano. No, actually, it would be appropriate to say I was a priest. As you see, not much is left on this town.」

The priest loosened his mouth a little.

「A few days ago, I felt faint revelation. I heard a voice say that people will come and save this ravaged world...The fact is that you two appeared right in the abandoned house that leads to our subterranean hideout...」

The...There was a secret place in the basement of this abandoned house!? But, that was a very convenient coincidence...I...I got it! The Great Goddess Isister must've adjusted the portal before I did in order to arrive at this particular place! And she was probably the one who gave this priest a revelation!

Father Luke smiled at us.

「Okay, let's go now. Our underground settlement has escaped from the hands of the beasts...let's head to the "Light of Hope".」

Chapter 56: Light of Hope

We followed Father Luke and went below the ground. Inside, there was a staircase built of soil. We went further down to the basement. After going a few steps in, I heard a sound above my head, as I looked up, I noticed that the open floor door closed automatically. Furthermore, the stairs we walked a few seconds ago had disappeared completely.

「Is this, perhaps...the work of magic? 」

「Yes. This is Lady Eich's earth magic. There are a few other entrances to the underground settlement besides the one in the abandoned house. But, even if someone finds one entrance, the beasts won't be able to come in because of magical mechanisms.」

The witch Eich applied her earth magic to create a secret settlement underground for humans to live in. Earth magic was a magic that could create a vast underground space if the invoker was highly skilled. However, that required one to have the talent of one in a million people.

I wondered if Father Luke guessed what I was thinking just by looking at my face. Father Luke smiled at me.

「Lady Eich is the younger sister of the legendary wizard Colt. 」

Colt...If I remember correctly, he was the wizard who accompanied Seiya to defeat the demon forces in the previous attempt to save Exfolia. I was sure of it. Just like the others with him at that time, he became a prey of the Demon King...

The wall next to the stairs was lit with lights at regular intervals. Unlike lamps or torches, the stones embedded in the soil seemed to emit light. I thought it was a "magical stone". It had enough power to emit light on every passage we came through.

Seiya asked Father Luke while we were going down the staircase.

「But, why do you have to stay underground? If you people can use magical earth attributes this well, won't you be able to get out of this town?」

「No. We can't leave Galvano because of the "Cursed Sphere"... As long as Bunogeos has his magic tool, people will become ashes if they venture out of town. However, even if we got out from here, there wouldn't be a safe place to live in Exfolia...」

「Ah!! I wonder if we can't go back to the God's realm because of that magic tool!! 」

I was speaking of the white wall that appeared inside the portal to the God's realm. I heard Father Luke say 「Probably 」 .

「The evil beast Bunogeos, with the Cursed Sphere, was a newly created monster when the Demon King made this world his own after benefiting from the powers of the "evil god of the mottled hair". Bunogeos and this town are under the control of the Beast Emperor Grand Leon. The Emperor reigns over the Radral continent where we live in.」

I became astonished after I heard Father Luke's words.

「Wa...Wait a minute! Are you saying that Bunogeos is not the boss of this continent? 」

「Bunogeos only rules this town. The Beast Emperor Grand Leon is the one who controls the continent. They say that it's a monster that can easily defeat Bunogeos.」

Bunogeos' status surpassed the strength of the Four General Kings in Geabrande!! He truly had ridiculous status!! Even so, there were demons more powerful than him!?

Without knowing what was on my mind, Seiya knocked his chest with his fist.

「Okay. There are no shortage of enemies. 」

「Oh! Our chosen hero is so brave! How reliable! 」

The priest looked happy...Well, but, I was truly sorry. This hero was only brave with his mouth. As it is now, Seiya will lose against Bunogeos by a good margin. Yes, without a doubt...

—

「...Okay, we've arrived. 」

Finally, the long underground stairs were over. I could see a large door in front of us.

I wondered if they had a secret signal. When the priest shook the hinge five times in an irregular rhythm, the door was opened with a cracking sound.

「Whoa...! 」

I was surprised when I saw what was beyond that door.

There was a vast area that didn't look like an underground. There were several houses lined up. Numerous magical stones installed in the high ceiling lighted every one of them. In the distance, vegetables crops grew in a field.

Seiya was also impressed and nodded in amazement.

「Oh. Incredible. There seems to be another town underground. 」

「This is a very humble place. The fields are not extraordinary as well. But, it is self-sufficient and allows us to keep on living. Because the light we have is made of magical powers, the crops don't grow very healthy though...」

The people of this place probably knew that we were coming here in advance. In front of me, there were dozens of men and women of all ages standing in a row.

I tried to wave my hand to the residents with a smile, but there was no response.

「Wha...What? 」

In Geabrande, the people had great respect for the hero and the goddess. However, all those in here were looking at us with apprehensive eyes.

When I felt uncomfortable, a young man dressed in steel armor walked towards us from the crowd. It was a shorthaired man with sharp-eyes.

「This person is the leader of our settlement “Light of Hope”. His name is Lord Brut...」

Even though the priest was introducing him, Brut did not stop walking. He headed on Seiya's direction without slowing down and grabbed his chest violently. He spoke with a heated voice.

「This face...I wasn't wrong after all!! You bastard!! You're still alive!!」

「Wha...What! Who are you!? Why are you acting so brusque!?」

Not only me, but Father Luke was so startled that he spoke with panic.

「What's wrong, Lord Burt!?」

Brut raised his voice against the priest while staring at Seiya.

「Father!! You don't know this person!? This man is the hero who failed to defeat the Demon King one year ago!!」

「What...!?」

Father Luke was speechless. Burt continued to speak loudly.

「I heard that the Demon King killed both Lord Colt and Princess Tiana from the Tarmine Kingdom!! But, only this guy managed to run away and hid somewhere else!! And now, after all this time, he appears like this as if nothing ever happened before!!」

I see...I was Princess Tiana once. But, I was reborn as a goddess and I spent a hundred years in the God's realm because of the difference in the flow of time. My appearance was totally different from Princess Tiana based on what I saw on the crystal ball. But, for Seiya, everything happened just a year ago. His face and appearance hardly changed that much. In other words, people who met Seiya before will recognize him for sure.

Brut pushed Seiya aggressively.

「Se...Seiya!?」

I ran to the fallen Seiya. The people, who were watching the situation from behind, began to raise their voices.

「It...It's true! I've seen him one year ago! He is the former hero!」

「That's right! He said, "Leave it to me", shouting confidently with his big mouth! But, in the end he was defeated by the Demon King and Exfolia was destroyed!」

「It's your fault! All of my family died because of you! 」

Almost everyone in the settlement started to speak in a hateful way against Seiya. Suddenly, before I knew it, the people grabbed sticks and farming tools, and surrounded us.

...No...No way!! Not only the demons with unusual status, but the humans living in Exfolia are also hostile to us!? So...This...This was the true degree of a SS-rank difficulty world!! What were we going to do, Seiya!?

Nonetheless, Seiya looked back at me in a calm state.

「Hey, Lady Goddess. What the people are saying is true? Have I been to this world before?」

I won't be able to hide this any longer. I told him the truth then.

「Yes...This is the second time you came to Exfolia. And you failed to save this world the last time you've been here...」

「I see... 」

The fallen Seiya remained in the ground, and then made a Dogeza*.

...Ehhhh!?

That was an unexpected sigh for me! This was unbelievable! Seiya was prostrating himself in front of the people! In addition, he spoke with an agonizing voice!

「I'm so sorry. Please, forgive me. 」

Do...Don't! What was this! I truly disliked this! Seiya was kneeling down!! I knew that what he was doing was a good action...but...but...I didn't want to see Seiya on that state!!

After Seiya apologized to the people, there was a brief moment of silent. Before long, one man began to shiver with anger.

「Sto...Stop messing with us!! Don't you think that everything will be fixed just by lowering you head to us!!」

「Lord Colt and Princess Tiana were killed because of you!! 」

「Yes, that's right!! 」

Someone threw a stone at Seiya. That stone hit Seiya's head because he didn't want to move away from it. And with that action, the people of the Light of Hope started to harass Seiya.

「Hey, wait!! Stop!! Stop this already!! 」

「Shut up!! 」

I tried to stop the outrage, but someone pushed me and I fell to the ground.

「I said to stop it!! Don't be that cruel to Seiya!! 」

I yelled but the violence didn't stop. The older women were looking at me with cold eyes.

「Hmm. What a useless goddess. They aren't that different from human beings. 」

「The red-haired goddess we had last time was also hopeless. The Demon King ate her that easily. She wasn't great to being with.」

「Don't you dare say anything bad about Aria!! 」

Before I noticed, the situation got much uglier.

「This world was destroyed because you guys were careless...! 」

Then, they approached me.

...Wh...Whoa!! Were they going to hit me too!?

The hero stood up in front of me when he noticed I was in fear.

「Please, stop it. I am the bad one. 」

「Se...Seiya...!! 」

「Broadcast didn't do anything wrong. 」

What...Who's that!? How could he call me a name that became so different from Listarte!? When will he remember my name for real!?

However, it seemed that the people became angrier when Seiya protected me. He began to get beaten again. Seiya's level was over 50. He didn't get much damage because his defense points were high...Even so, I couldn't stand to watch this anymore.

...Why!? We came to save this world, and this is what we get in return!?

At that time, I was about to burst into tears.

「Please, stop it now. 」

A high and dignified voice echoed. The hands of the common people stopped immediately.

A girl was standing at the end of everyone's line of sight. She was dressed poorly like the other people in the settlement. But, her thin arms were adorned with ornaments.

「Lady Eich...! 」

Someone muttered loudly.

「Everyone. Please, stop. I'm sure my bother Colt wouldn't want you to behave like this. 」

The witch Eich. She was the one who created this settlement with the usage of earth magic. She was far younger than I imagined her to be. She looked like she had, perhaps, six or seven years old. The voice of this girl was more imposing than Elle's. The riot that was happening in the village quickly settled down.

「Tha...Thank you... 」

I thanked Eich. But, her eyes were also cold-looking like everyone else.

「Goddess and hero. Thank you for coming. However, coming here is useless. There isn't anyone who can defeat the Demon King Artemaeus.」

....The Demon King...Artemaeus...!

An unpleasant feeling ran through my body when I heard the name of the ultimate demon of Exfolia. I thought this reaction happened because my soul was killed by that demon before.

「It's no longer possible to save this world. 」

When the riot was over, Eich turned back and left us. The people also left with her as they spit on the ground while looking back at us.

Who remained behind was Seiya, Father Luke, Brut and I.

Brut was staring at me.

「Hey, goddess. You're called "Broadcast", am I right? 」

「No. My name is Listarte... 」

「Whatever. Are you really planning to defeat the Demon King and save this world? 」

「I intended to do that...but... 」

「Then what can you do? 」

I wanted to say "Healing". However, my powers were sealed.

「...I have the Appraisal skill. 」

Brut showed me a bored face.

「I can do that too. What else can you do? 」

「I...I have wings. I can fly in the sky. 」

I thought that the Great Goddess Isister would be able to give me permission to activate my Lista Wing...!

「Order!! 」

I raised my voice. But, nothing happened.

...Yes. It was useless after all. I couldn't communicate with the Great Goddess Isister. If I couldn't go home then it was obvious that my connection was lost too.

「So you can't even use that. 」

Brut looked at me with piercing eyes. I strengthened my tone.

「I...I can't die! Goddesses never die! 」

「Immortal? Really? 」

Brut did not ask me that. He looked at Father Luke instead. The priest nodded in agreement.

「Tradition says that gods and goddesses don't die. 」

「Oh... 」

Eh! Now what? Did he finally change his mind about me? Ah...But...But if I think carefully about it, the enemy could kill me if he has the Chain Destruction...And, in Exfolia I've seen that fearsome power in the hands of the werewolf and Bunogeos...

I decided to be honest.

「To tell you the truth, I can die occasionally. 」

「What do you mean you can die occasionally!? Then, you're not immortal!? 」

Brut was stunned. But, after a bored sigh, he scratched his head.

「A goddess that can die occasionally and a hero who failed once before. This is an absurd joke. It seems that the heavens do not intend to save Exfolia after all.」

Then, Brut gave us a cold look.

「Still, you must have something useful if you came all the way here. Defeating the Demon King will be a very difficult task. But, can you defeat Bunogeos at least, no?」

「A...About that... 」

Seiya's level was MAX when he defeated the demonic Warlord Emperor back in Geabrande. Even though Bunogeos had a similar ability value as the Emperor, Seiya's current status was only at level 50. But...

「Okay. We'll take him down. 」

Seiya has been silent until now. He spoke without speaking to me beforehand. Brut explained.

「Bunogeos created a market where monsters can buy and sell out of town. That's the place where he raises slaves. You must defeat Bunogeos and free the humans.」

I didn't know if I would be able to defeat Bunogeos. Still, we had no choice but to try or we're not going to get out of here. However, though, above the ground was a den full of enemies with high ability statuses.

「Let...Let us prepare at least! 」

I requested that preference to Brut. We had to wear some weapons and armors even if everything was of humble origins in the Light of Hope.

Brut snarled and touched Father Luke's shoulder as he walked away. Father Luke was left behind with us. He smiled at us while he pointed to a man sitting in front of a house a little further away.

「That's the tool shop. 」

Just like what happened in Geabrande, the Great Goddess Isister gave me the currency of Exfolia in advance. I took a sachet of money out of my pocket and we headed to the tool shop...However, the only tools available were the magical stones and agricultural tools that emitted light. Only the things necessary for daily life were displayed in the shop. I was hoping to find an item that could cure Seiya's confusion, but they didn't even have medicinal herbs or poison-scented herbs.

「Father Luke. Besides the tool shop, don't you have weaponry and armory shops too?」

「Unfortunately, we don't have any of those shops. We don't have enough supplies here.」

It was exactly as Aria said to me. Exfolia was unlikely to have any decent equipment.

I sighed as I dropped my shoulders. Then, I heard someone's voice.

「Hey, you. Do you want to change jobs? I'll change it for you if you want me to.」

It was an old man with few front teeth. Father Luke introduced him to us.

「This person is Enzo. He is the "Baptist" of the Light of Hope. You can change your current job if you ask the Baptist.」

Seiya had a very confusing expression on his face.

「Job? Isn't being a hero my profession? 」

Enzo shook his head.

「In this world, there is no profession as a hero...Let's see. Well...Your current job is a "Magic Warrior". More precisely, a "Fire Magic Warrior".」

When Seiya was in Geabrande, he learnt a variety of different spells and magical attributes. But, Fire Magic was always his main attribute to being with. Just as before, Seiya already acquired powerful fire magical sword attacks, such as the Phoenix Drive and Phoenix Thrust.

Enzo smiled.

「A wizard and a warrior...It's a great position combined with two different professions...the "Magic Warrior". Only those who can accomplish this feat are heroes. But, if you want to quit being a Magic Warrior, I could give you two different jobs in exchange...So, what will you do?」

I wanted to ask him what kind of other jobs were available for Seiya...

「No. I don't mind the job I have now. 」

Seiya answered immediately. If this Seiya was the cautious Seiya, he would have asked for the job options and would've examined them carefully...But, I agreed with him not change the current job. Magic Warrior was a great "job". It's surely not possible for any greater job than this one to exist. And even if he changed jobs, he probably had to take some time to get used to it. We couldn't afford that now.

「Okay. We shall go now. 」

Seiya walked to the exit of the Light of Hope. When we got closer to the exit, Father Luke remembered something and said 「Wait for a little moment 」 , and went away in a hurry. Then, he came back holding a scabbard on his hands.

「Please take this sword. It's a bit rusty, but it's better than nothing. 」

「Tha...Thank you very much! 」

「Good luck... 」

I said thanks and waved goodbye at the priest.

When I looked at my side, I noticed that Seiya was looking attentively at the sword.

「Hmm. There's a 120% chance that I can win with this. 」

「No...Don't be too self-confident! You sound as if you have the "Excalibur"! That sword is a bit rusty, you know...?」

「Gonna be Okay. 」

「Don't keep saying that. You should be saying Perfectly Ready instead... 」

「What's that? 」

「Ah... 」

I left the Light of Hope with an indescribable anxiety that told me that we were about to get crushed for real...

Chapter 57: Difference in Power

After going up the long stairs, I saw a wooden board in the distance. I pushed it with my hand. Both Seiya and I crawled out from the basement.

Dirty walls, shabby furniture and an extensive old-looking floor...It was an abandoned house. However, the feeling was different from the one that Father Luke appeared to guide us to the Light of Hope.

We got close to the window to have a glimpse of the outside world. The scenery was also different from last time. We went exactly through the same stairs, but it seemed that Eich's earth magic led us to a different abandoned house.

I could hear a loud noise coming from the outside. The beast men were gathered in the same spot. When I looked further ahead, I could see several humans with collars and handcuffs arranged in a row. Apparently, this location was near the slave market place that Brut told us about.

「Hey, Seiya. We don't have to do exactly as Brut told us to do. You can't beat Bunogeos at your current level. So, the best thing to do right now is to free the slaves in the market. If we do that, the people of the Light of Hope will see us with other eyes. That's why for now... 」

I was talking to Seiya while I looked at the outside from the window...and I discovered something terrible.

...The hero, holding the rusty sword, was walking quietly outside!

screams

I shouted aloud. I immediately left the house and chased after Seiya!

「Hey!? What on earth are you thinking!? 」

I had a hard time running towards him and speaking at the same time. Even so, Seiya looked at me with a cool expression.

「I'm going to defeat Bunogeos, isn't that obvious? Nothing will be resolved if I remain in that house, correct?」

「I told you not to fight. We should free the sla...slaves...eh... 」

More than a dozen beasts were staring at Seiya and I in the main street.

「Hey...these humans don't have a collar, do they? 」

「Are they, perhaps, stray humans? 」

Whoa!! It's too late!!

My heartbeat made a heavy buzz. Yet, Seiya was not disturbed at all.

「I'm going to fight them anyways. I'm glad you made me save my energy for a brief time. 」

Seiya put the rusty sword on his shoulder and walked towards the beast men.

「Uh...? Wha...What's up with this human...! 」

The beast men didn't attack Seiya because they felt something was weird about Seiya's eerie attitude. The beast men opened the path for Seiya to cross as if god split the sea in two. I hurryingly followed after Seiya.

...Wha...What? Don't tell me that there was a slight chance that we could free the humans from slavery if everything went like this...?

However, a fox-faced beast, who was a few meters away from us, noticed our presence and yelled extremely high.

「Hey, Hey!! What the hell are you guys doing!! Stop them right now!! 」

「Ro...Roger!! 」

Some beast men surrounded us after they heard the warning of the fox beast.

...That...That's right...This was not going to work out the way I wanted...

A rhino beast man with a ragged skin looked at us while twisting his tongue.

「These ones are not controlled by anyone... 」

The fox beast agreed.

「You're right. Nobody will blame us if they are killed or eaten... 」

While we were listening to this hectic conversation, I knew that we had no choice but to prepare to go against them.

That...That meant we had no choice but to fight...!

I activated my clairvoyance ability! I wanted to see the status of the five beasts surrounding us, including the rhino and fox beasts! The individual attack power of each of them was over 30,000! We've got strong enemies here!

However, the beast men still watched us while they spoke with one another. I took this chance to grab my hair and I pulled some strings. It hurt, but I had no time to complain. I gave my blonde hair to Seiya.

「Here! I'll give you this! You remember how to use it, right? 」

「Of course. 」

When he nodded, he put my blonde hair on his bangs. The gold was shining on Seiya's glossy black hair. It became a mesh between gold and black as if he went to the hairdresser. I shouted.

「That's wrong!! Why did you use that for hair extensions!? That was for your synthesis!! 」

「Huh? Synthesis? 」

「That's one of your special skills!! The sword is rusty, but it was a steel sword originally!! You can make a platinum sword if you combine my hair with a steel sword!!」

Seiya was looking at me with an oblivious expression. I forcibly took his hand and, I put the sword and my hair together...Then, a dazzling light was generated, and the rusty sword became a splendid shining platinum sword in an instant. Seiya's face brightened when he saw the newly platinum sword.

「What a great sword...! I'll be able to win against the Demon King as long I have this...! 」

I didn't think he could win though. Or rather, I didn't even know if he'll able to overcome the current ordeal.

Finally, on that moment, the fox beast yelled loudly.

「I'll go!! I'll be the first one!! 」

Suddenly, the fox beast jumped on us...

screams

I crouched down, but Seiya jumped in front of me. I heard something on that instant...The platinum sword that Seiya held on his hands made a strong sound!

「Eternal Sword...! 」

The attack using the platinum sword created an illusionary image that drew in the air and intercepted the fox beast man! After the illusionary image disappeared, the body of the fox beast separated into pieces! Blood was splashed everywhere and dozens of meat pieces fell to the ground!

「Yo...You...You bastard!! 」

The four beasts, who just witnessed the death of their comrade, jumped all at once! He won't be able to defeat them all using his last sword technique! Still...

「Maximum Inferno...! 」

The arm without the sword became engulfed in flames! Before the beasts reached Seiya, he created a chain of fire with his hands! The beasts were wrapped in flames!

screams

excruciating pain

All I could hear were the screams of the beast men. They were burnt rapidly by the super-hot temperature of the Maximum Inferno. All of them were destroyed on the spot.

Seiya lifted his burning hands forward.

「...Open the way if you don't want to transform into charcoal. 」

Several beasts watched the situation from afar. When Seiya professed those threatening words, every beast trembled in fear. Seiya walked straightforward with confidence.

...He defeated four beasts in an instant!? When I was in Geabrande, I only witnessed the usage of that skill to get rid of the enemies' remains, so I didn't notice it...but, Maximum Inferno was an amazing top grade fire magic!!

But, I noticed something bad while I admired him! The rhino beast managed to endure the fire somehow! The skin was firm, that's why he survived the burning flames! He tried to attack Seiya from behind!

「Seiya, behind you!! One of them is still alive!! 」

I shouted, but Seiya didn't turn around! Yet, Seiya used the flames of the platinum sword from his sideline and pierced through the rhino beast!

「Phoenix Thrust...! 」

At the same time, the beasts in the vicinity began to mutter after they saw the deadly collapse of the rhino beast...

「Who...Who is this human!? 」

「He's very strong!! 」

The beasts in the vicinity seemed to have lost their will to fight. I gripped my teeth in excitement.

...Seiya's personality became reckless...but, his rare battle sense was alive and well! Whether careful or reckless, Ryuguuin Seiya always had an outstanding talent!

In front of my eyes, I could see many slaves connected with chains in an open field!

「Seiya! Let's free all of the slaves! After doing that, we should return with them to the Light of Hope!」

I ran with Seiya to free the slaves...

「Everything is okay now! 」

While Seiya looked at our surroundings, I started to release the chains stuck on the slaves.

I finally managed to release the last chain on a captive human being. Suddenly, the area became noisy and loudly.

「Hey. What the hell is happening here? 」

My spine froze when I heard a terrifying familiar voice. A large beast with armor arrived with a crowd of other beast men.

「This...This can't be, right...? What's up with this timing...! 」

The pig-looking beast that resembled an orc and the ruler of this town arrived...The Evil Beast Bunogeos was coming closer to where we were standing still!

When he looked at Seiya and I, he scratched his neck and spoke.

「Ah, don't tell me that you're the goddess and the hero. The evil god of mottled hair told me about you. He said, 『Soon, the messenger of god will come to release the slaves. 』 It seems he was right.」

...“Evil god of mottled hair”? Does that mean that the enemy was sensing our movements? Maybe he led the werewolf that invaded the God's realm...?

Bunogeos and his beast men gathered around Seiya and I! All of the other fearful beast men became confident when Bunogeos appeared! There were about dozens of demons! However, Bunogeos shook his large hand to the beast men.

「All of you step aside. It's all right. Leave this to me. 」

A distraction! I secretly whispered on Seiya's ear!

「Se...Seiya! It's our chance! Let's distract Bunogeos with Maximum Inferno and escape with the slaves!」

「Why escape when I could defeat their boss for once and for all? 」

「I already told you that it's impossible to defeat him!! The lives of the slaves are our top priority right now!! You got it!?」

「Well...I guess you're right. 」

I had somehow convinced Seiya. However, Bunogeos anticipated our course of action and laughed with a mischievous voice.

「I won't let you run away. If you escape, I'll tear apart the neck of this slave. 」

Before I knew it, Bunogeos held a captive woman on his arm. The woman groaned painfully as he pressured on her neck without mercy.

The sharp-pointed eyes of the hero were fiercely fixated on Bunogeos.

「Lady Goddess. I can't abandon that hostage. I will only leave this place after defeating Bunogeos and freeing all of the slaves.」

Whoa! What he had just said was the correct attitude to have for a brave hero! Yet, he won't be able to beat Bunogeos...!

Bunogeos noticed Seiya's fighting spirit. On that moment, he pushed the slave woman behind him and tried to grab the axe on his back.

「Chain Destruction...I wonder what it meant. Ah, I remember now. If I kill you using this power, neither the hero nor the goddess will be able to revive.」

「Why...Why do you own that thing!! Did you get it from that "evil god of mottled hair"!? 」

「I don't need to tell you that. 」

...While I diverted the attention of Bunogeos, Seiya's sword became engulfed in flames! Before Bunogeos grabbed his axe...

「Take this...! Phoenix Drive...! 」

With a fearsome spirit, Seiya charged forward to cut down Bunogeos using his powerful attack! Nonetheless, Bunogeos had a very relaxed expression on his face and he took a deep breath! Soon, his insane breathing force disturbed my hair and dress! He was sucking everything around him! He blew out the air that he sucked to his mouth and charged against Seiya!

「Ugh...! 」

Seiya's offensive movement stopped amidst the terrible gusts of wind! At the same time, the flames that covered Seiya's sword vanquished as if a candle light was blown away!

「*grins* I had to extinguish it first because fire burns. 」

It seemed that Bunogeos sealed the magical fire sword with his breathing power. Even so, Seiya jumped in Bunogeos' direction to attack him.

「If so, then...Eternal Sword...! 」

Even though the Phoenix Drive was sealed, Seiya used the power of Adenela's technique combined with his own skill and hit Bunogeos, who was off-guard! I cheered up inside my heart when that strike was successful...or so I thought...

「Hmm? Did you do something to me right now? 」

He received all the blows of Seiya's powerful attack, and even so, I didn't see any damage inflicted on Bunogeos.

Seiya repeated the consecutive gunshot sword attack without giving up. Suddenly, the movement of his arms stopped. When I looked closely, I saw that Bunogeos was holding the platinum sword with his hand!

「I told you it didn't hurt that much...but you...are a very depressing fella!! 」

And then, with his other arm, he attacked Seiya's stomach with his fist! Seiya's feet got out of the ground and he came flying with a dull sound!

「Ah...! 」

「Seiya!! 」

Seiya was thrown to the ground with a single blow. Bunogeos showed a bored expression.

「What? Is it already over? I didn't even use my ax. I wonder why this hero is so weak. No...Am I too strong?」

He...He spoke as if he was fighting against a baby! He knew that he was too strong for the hero!

I knew that too. Seiya's attack power didn't make any scratches on Bunogeos. Their statuses were too different in power.

...We...We won't be able to save the slaves anymore! But...we had to escape from this place as soon as possible!

I rushed instinctively towards Seiya, but the dog-faced beast appeared right in front of me! At the same time, I felt a violent impact on my neck!

「Ugh...! 」

The beast man attacked me. I fell on the ground just like Seiya.

In the midst of my fading consciousness, I could see that Bunogeos took his ax.

...Ah...With that ax, our souls will be destroyed forever...so, our adventure ended here...

—

「Uh, hmm... 」

How long as it been since then. I got up while holding my injured neck.

The area was dim. I could see a thick iron grid in front of me. It looked like I was in an iron cage. Next to me was a similar jail container. And, inside was...

「Seiya!? 」

His sword was taken but Seiya looked unharmed. He was laying on the floor with his body turned upside down.

「Hey, are you okay!? Hang on!! 」

「Ye...Yeah... 」

Somehow, Seiya raised his upper body after he heard my call. He held his beaten stomach with his hands. It looked quite painful. But, at least, his life was not at risk.

「I'm glad! You're safe! 」

When I said those words...

「...I really wonder if he's safe. 」

There was a voice behind me.

「Who...Who is it!? 」

I felt relieved when I saw a woman on the corner of this dim place. The woman was that hostage taken by Bunogeos a while ago.

「You're safe too! How about the other slaves? 」

「I don't know for sure. But, the fact that they're not in this dungeon might indicate that Bunogeos lift the Cursed Sphere temporarily to sell them. They must be out of this town. 」

「That...That can't be...! 」

「Oh dear. I'm sure they're happy. They're still alive. The problem is that we... 」

The woman told me the harsh truth.

「You and me will become a feast for the belly of Bunogeos. 」

「Ah...Ah!? Are you saying that we'll be eaten!? Isn't this town a place to make slaves!? That was what Bunogeos said too...」

「Officially, yes. The fact is that he enjoys eating young women secretly. Well...that's just a rumor. But, soon it will be the time to pay the yearly contribution.」

The infamous large orc appeared. He looked at the cell where Seiya was stuck, and laughed.

「This hero must be kept alive to be presented to His Majesty the Grand Lion. *grins* His Majesty the Grand Lion will praise me for sure.」

He looked satisfied while he rubbed his own stomach. Then, he came to the front of the cells where I was locked up with the woman. He stared at us as if he was examining us from the other side of the thick iron grid.

「I'll get some credit because I caught the hero. But, I need a reward right now. These two will serve me right.」

His ugly face got closer to the iron grid and then he grabbed me.

「Well then, let's start with the goddess. 」

Chapter 58: The World is Over

Even if the goddesses are invulnerable, their body can be destroyed, when that happens their soul gets transferred to the God's realm! Swallowed, for example, eaten, was also a possibility of a tragic end to the body!

「You...You're kidding me, right...? 」

However, Bunogeos unlocked my cell with a key and entered inside!

「St...Stop it, Bunogeos...! 」

Seiya screamed on the cell next door. Yet, Bunogeos took my arm forcibly without much care. He made me stand close to his chest. I felt an excited rough breath on my breasts.

「No...No...! Stop...! 」

Bunogeos looked closely at me... I was trembling in fear. He had a stoic expression on his face. However, soon his expression became puzzled.

「Wha...What is this? This goddess...Why do you smell so sour? 」

「...Eh!? 」

「I can't. It's rotten. I won't eat this. 」

「Wait...Wait a second!! You're joking, right!? 」

Bunogeos released my hand and threw me to the floor. I could hear the cheerful voice of Seiya locked in the cell next to me.

「Lady Goddess! I'm glad you're rotten! 」

Bunogeos responded to Seiya as if they were having a regular conversation.

「I'm a fan of gourmet food. That's why I don't want to eat rotten and strange things. 」

I was so terrified a minute ago. But, right now, I was shaking for another reason.

「Who's the "rotten and strange" thing, you bastard!! I am a goddess, you know!! Correct yours words right now, you damn monster!!」

「No matter what you say, the truth is that your smell stinks. 」

「I don't stink!! Eat me!! Try eating me and you'll know for real, you bastard!!」

I would rather choose to be eaten than being humiliated like this. Still, Bunogeos ignored me and walked up to the woman on the cell behind me.

「I knew this human was the one I wanted to eat. 」

「What!? Didn't you say you'll start with me first!? 」

I tried to grab him, but he pushed me away aggressively. Bunogeos locked the door of my cage and took the woman with him. He grabbed the woman's chin with his thick fingers to infuriate Seiya and I.

「You have a white and delicious skin, don't you? It was a shame to enslave you.」

Bunogeos stopped touching her chin and, with his black fingernail, pierced the woman's cheek.

「...Ah! 」

The woman cried as a little red blood dripped from her cheek. He wiped the blood with his finger and licked it. Bunogeos distorted his own mouth.

「Delicious. It's really delicious after all. This is topnotch...I really want to eat her slowly, but if the other beasts find me, then I won't have an enjoyable time. It can't be helped. I will eat her right here.」

I felt angry for the humiliation, but soon, my eyes became wide open when I realized that a human was about to be eaten in front of me. The same happened with Seiya on the Iron cage next door.

「Step aside, Bunogeos...! Don't you dare touch that woman...! 」

Bunogeos laughed happily when he saw that Seiya shaking the iron grid violently.

「You can't prevent me. I'm going to eat her now. You guys should just watch while I eat the delicious meat of this woman.」

「Stop it immediately, Bunogeos! 」

I also shook the iron grid. But, there was no way I would break it because Seiya wasn't even able to do it himself.

Bunogeos was looking delightful to see our frustration.

「It's useless. That iron grid is hard to break. It's even difficult for me. It was designed to prevent people like you from escaping.」

「Ugh...! 」

I hit my fist on the grid. Bunogeos looked amusingly at me, he even said 「What's up with her? 」 , when he saw my desperation.

「Why...Why is this happening to me...!! If it was the usual Seiya...If it was the cautious Seiya...nothing like this would ever happen...!!」

Bitter words came out from my mouth.

「...Lady Goddess. 」

When I looked over, I noticed that Seiya was looking at me.

「I...I'm sorry. You're not a bad person. I'm the one who's bad. You lost your memory because of me. That's why we ended up being on this hopeless situation...」

「Lady Goddess. It seems that I really lost my memory...Can I save this woman if my memory returns?」

To be honest, I didn't think we could get over this predicament just by changing his character. In spite of this, I could feel a sense of hope if that were to happen.

Because if the hero was calm and cautious, that would bring a different way of seeing things. He would probably try to think of every possible scenario to get us out of here...!

I nodded quietly.

「Yes. That's a possibility. The mental resilience of your cautious self would be extremely strong because of the regret he had from failing to save Exfolia last time.」

「...I see. 」

On the cell next to me, a tremendous sound was heard when someone hit the iron grid fiercely.

「Eh...!? 」

Before I knew it, Seiya was hitting his head against the Iron bars!

「Se...Seiya!? 」

Bunogeos was also stunned to see the weirdness of Seiya's actions.

「Ah? What are you doing? 」

He was bleeding violently from his forehead after hitting so many times on the iron bars! Still, Seiya did not stop hurting himself!

「I don't care what happens to me if...that woman can be saved. 」

「I...I just said it was a possibility! Don't do unreasonable things! 」

「It's okay. When I was in my original world, I managed to fix a TV that was no longer operational using this method.」

「Seiya!! You're not a TV!! 」

I couldn't stop him...However, this Seiya was desperately trying to remember the other Seiya. His persistence hurt my heart.

...How many times did he hit his head? Bunogeos was looking amusingly at Seiya's action, but eventually, he became bored and slapped his face.

「Okay well, I should start now. 」

He showed his twisted tongue when he looked at the woman.

In the midst of despair, Seiya hit his head harder.

「...It's all right. Don't worry about me...I don't care anymore. 」

Suddenly, I heard a voice. It was the voice of the woman captured by Bunogeos.

「I'm afraid to be eaten. But, if I endure this pain, I will be able to get out of this hell... 」

「Wha...What are you saying? 」

The woman smiled kindly at me, even though she was about to be eaten and killed.

「Because...this world is already over... 」

She spoke with a firm voice. It seemed that she gave up in an honorable way.

Bang Bang

It sounded as if something cracked from the cell next door.

「Wha...What? 」

Like Bunogeos, I looked at the cell where Seiya was locked and...I was astonished! That strong iron bars were falling down! From there, Seiya crawled out with his bloodied head!

「How...How many times should I repeat myself...? I realized something bad would happen when that werewolf appeared during that time. This world can't be saved...」

He spoke with a lower tone and a seemingly cold voice! My heart throbbed!

...No...No way...!! But, there was no doubt about this!! I recognized the air surrounding the person I knew before...!!

Just in case, I activated my clairvoyance ability to check Seiya's status!

«State: Normal»

O...Okay!! I knew it!! The confusion was finally gone!! The cautious hero has returned!!

Seiya took his bloodied hair away from his forehead. He exhaled a small breath and walked up in front of Bunogeos' sight.

「Who the hell are you? How did you break that cage? 」

I got agitated when Seiya went face-to-face with Bunogeos at a close distance.

I was so happy that he was back!! But, just because his personality has changed, that didn't mean that his status changed as well!! Even if Seiya returned to normal, it will be impossible for him to defeat Bunogeos with his lower status, or can he!?

Seiya was looking at Bunogeos legs mysteriously. On that moment, he touched the enemy with his bloody hands. Soon after, Bunogeos changed his expression along with the look of his eyes dramatically.

「You...You bastard!! How dare you touch me, the noble Bunogeos, with your dirty hands!?! 」

「I didn't just touch you. I destroyed you. 」

「...Ah? 」

Suddenly, I heard a smashing sound! The sound resembled the smashing of fruits that fell on the ground! Bunogeos' leg ripped completely apart and black blood overflow from it without stopping!

screams intensely

At first, the face of Bunogeos, who could not recognize what happened, distorted with pain! Seiya's cold voice echoed above the head of a crying Bunogeos, who crouched with one knee!

「Destruction Operation Method the First...“Shattered Break”...! 」

...Valkyrie's destruction technique...!! So, he remembered it!? I see...I see!! The destruction technique would be perfect for someone who let their guard down!! That's why it worked on the high-leveled Bunogeos because of his ignorance!! Even the strong iron cage was destroyed!!

While Bunogeos was crouching in pain, Seiya destroyed the iron bars on my cell. When I got out and tried to get closer to Seiya...

「Lista. Don't come. Stay back. 」

Seiya stopped me with his signaling hand. He finally called my name properly. However, the tension slowly rose...

「Ho...How...How dare you....!! 」

Bunogeos got up while holding his injured leg.

「You're just an insignificant human!! 」

Bunogeos revealed his true nature. His eyes were wide open, his fangs were fully exposed, and his ferocious face stared at Seiya with a murderous intent. Yet, Seiya didn't move at all.

「Just an insignificant human, you say? I'm not the same one as before. 」

When he said those words, a flame immersed from Seiya's body and swirled to protect the slave woman and me!

「I'll show you my powerful skill. Be prepared to face the ultimate technique that the Goddess of Destruction taught me in the heavens.」

「Interesting...Just bring it on, you piece of shit!! C'mon on!! I'll show you how to feel real pain!!」

—
...Right now, Seiya and I, ran through the stairs of the dungeon while we carried the slave woman with us.

「Once the stairs are over...if I remember correctly, yes, turn right. If we go that way, we'll be able to escape from this dungeon...」

The slave woman was guiding us through this dim place. She asked Seiya the following.

「Are...Are we running away...? But, didn't you just rip him off...? 」

「Yeah. In fact, I just remembered one of the destructive techniques, even so we had to get away because that was a very dangerous place to be in.」

「So, that's what happened... 」

「There was no way I would be able to run away from a monster like that. Even if we tried to run away, he would catch up with us really fast. That's why I had to damage his leg first. If we can avoid the other beasts, then we should be able to escape without any problems.」

「Ah! But, Seiya! We can't go back to the God's realm even if we escape from this place! We can't cross over the portal to the God's realm because of the enemy's magic powers!」

「I didn't forget the memories of when my mind was clouded. So, I figured it out what was going on. If I can't go to the heavenly world, then I should return to the underground settlement "Light of Hope" and prepare in there.」

「Pre...Prepare what? 」

「Of course, I need to prepare in order to defeat him. 」

...Did he plan to defeat Bunogeos without practicing in the God's realm!? Bu...But...!!

When I saw his dignified and sharpened profile, I thought...

Wha...What was this sense of security!! That's right!! So, this was the way that my Ryuguuin Seiya was supposed to act!! This person was my beloved darling!!

I was so excited that I tried to put my arm around Seiya's arm. However, Seiya shook off my hand away from him.

「Hey. Don't be too familiar with me. So, don't touch me. 」

「Eh...? 」

Wha...What...? I thought his memory was back, right...? Is...Is he embarrassed to display affection in public? That must be it, surely...?

Chapter 59: Fist and Promise (1)

We encountered several mean beasts on the way. However, we managed to get away from them by using Seiya's fire magic. We reached the abandoned house and we slip under the floor to reach the staircase that led to the Light of Hope settlement.

I felt relieved that we escaped from Bunogeos. But, my feelings were short-lived when I recalled the riots that happened in the Light of Hope. We didn't free the slaves, and we didn't defeat Bunogeos, but we managed to bring a slave woman with us...I guess it was better than arriving empty-handed, but again, I expected to hear Brut and everyone else's complains.

When we reached the end of the staircase, I rang the hinge of the door that appeared right in front of us. When the door opened, the people of the Light of Hope glanced at us under the vast space illuminated by the magical stones. Brut and his fellow men approached us rapidly.

Brut came hurryingly and stared fixedly at Seiya.

「So...did you beat Bunogeos? 」

「No. I didn't defeat him. 」

I could hear the sound of gritted teeth after he heard Seiya's answer. After that, Brut glanced at the slave woman that came with us.

「What about the other slaves? 」

「The rest was sold out of this town. This woman was the only one we were able to rescue.」

「Ah...I see... 」

On that precise moment, Brut grabbed Seiya's chest and got close to his face. He looked furious as he threatened Seiya.

「How dare you call yourself a brave hero...! 」

Before I could say anything, the woman we helped came forward immediately.

「Stop that! Don't you see that this man saved me? 」

Then, Brut released his hands from Seiya's chest and pushed him away.

「Yeah, that's right. He didn't overthrow Bunogeos and came back with only one slave. This wonderful person must be the promised hero that we can rely on.」

「Hey, wait! Don't say it like that! Seiya did his best you know! 」

Even though we shouted to defend Seiya, Brut's fellow men had bitter expressions on their faces. It was as if they looked down on Seiya.

「Hey, look at him. He has a scar on his head. 」

「He probably ran away to protect his miserable life after being beaten by Bunogeos. 」

When I noticed it, all of the people from the Light of Hope gathered around us. The men and women from all ages agreed with Brut and his fellow men.

「He is a truly pathetic hero! 」

「He is so useless! 」

Everyone started to abuse Seiya verbally once again. This was a tense atmosphere, but Seiya stood still and stared silently at them.

In the meantime, I spoke urgently to Brut in order to change this desperate situation.

「Hey, listen. We'll go to the slave market once again. And this time, we're going to defeat Bunogeos for sure.」

However, Seiya shook his head.

「No. I'm not ready. 」

「Just go... 」

「I refuse. 」

In a second, Brut's eyes became sharp and were pointed intensively at Seiya. I pulled my arms widely open to avoid a clash between them...

「It's your fault that this world became like this! You have no right to decline! 」

When I tried to calm everyone down, something happened abruptly.

beating sound

I heard a very loud sound that even shook my earlobe. And then...

「Ugh...! 」

Brut, who had been speaking with an angry voice towards Seiya, made a pitiful voice come out from his own mouth! I knew that this would happen! When I looked closely, I saw that Seiya's fist beat Brut's head as if he pierced through his brain!

「Shup up. 」

Just when Seiya professed those icy words, Brut foamed from his mouth he was defeated in one second!

...Wha...Wha...Wha...Wha...What...!

I became dizzy at the sight that happened right in front of me. I shook my nose and my voice trembled enormously.

「*screams* Whaaaaaat!? 」

Everyone around Brut screamed all at once! It was as if they were reading my own mind!

「You...You...You bastard!! 」

「Wha...What the hell do you think you're doing!? 」

「You didn't save this world and you can't even defeat Bunogeos, but you can use violence against Burt!?! 」

Yet, Seiya spoke as if he didn't do anything wrong.

「You're extremely noisy. I'll beat you with my fist. 」

And then, Seiya stood in front of Brut's fellow men.

「You people are noisy too. 」

On that moment, Seiya rose his fist above his head...

beating sound

「Ugh!! 」

「You...You bastard, what did you do... 」

「My fist for you too. 」

beating sound

「Sto...p!! 」

repetitive beating sound

With the hero's extraordinary physical strength, Brut's fellow men fell to the ground one after another while foaming from their mouths!

I couldn't watch this fight anymore. Soon, the older women of the settlement stood in front of Seiya. They were the ones that spoke badly of me previously, and they mocked Aria as well.

「Ho...How dare you! 」

「That's right! You didn't save our world last time! How dare you come here and act this way against us!」

「We're not going to open the Light of Hope to you ever again! 」

...What can Seiya do about these women!! There was no way that he would beat older women with his fist...!!

At least that's what I thought...

beating sound

Another terrible sound! At the same time, I doubted my eyes!

The hero's fist beat the brain of an elderly woman!

「Wha...Ugh...!? 」

The elderly woman vomited foam from her mouth violently! She spoke with a pitiful voice while she fell down!

「Se...Se...Seiya!! Even if they were rude, there's no need to overreact like this!! 」

「That...That's right!! We're women, you know!? 」

「So what. 」

beating sound

「Hihii....Ugh...!? 」

Another elderly woman fell down! The foaming coming out from her mouth spilled on my face!

...He...He...He became such an outrageous man! At first, I thought that this madness finally stopped! However...this drew attention! He was getting everyone's attention!

During this crazy assault, I could hear a new voice.

「Stop it! What did you do to my mother! 」

It was the voice of a young boy. It seemed that the mother of this child was among the fallen women. The boy saw Seiya "naturally" beat up his mother with his fist.

「You're a stupid hero! Very stupid hero! 」

The child was insulting Seiya with bitter words!

...Please, don't do it, Seiya!? There's no way you'll do such a thing, right!? Because...I know who you are!! You're still very kind, aren't you!?

Nonetheless...

beating sound

「Ah...Ugh...!? 」

The hero's fist also hit the brain of the child! The hero spoke mercilessly when the child fell to ground with rolled white eyes.

「Bad boys deserve my fist too. 」

Oh god, he really did hit the young boy!? And he did it without mercy!? A namahage*!? The hero has transformed into a real namahage!? Was this really okay, to be honest!? This will backfire in many ways!!

I shuddered in fear! The people of the Light of Hope roared! And then, Seiya raised his fist again!

「This is bothersome. Put all of them in a row. I'll teach them a lesson with my fist. 」

A man on his forties approached an upset Seiya and made an excuse.

「I...I didn't say anything about you! Yes! It was the other guys who spoke badly of you...」

「Shut up. 」

beating sound

「To...To be honest...I've always thought you were cool... 」

「Shup up. 」

beating sound

「Ple...Please! Spare me... 」

「No. You deserve my fist. 」

beating sound

The people tried to make excuses! But, Seiya used his fist on them!

I couldn't stand to watch this anymore.

「Seiya!! STOP!! STOP this “fist” thing!! 」

However...

beating sound

「!!...Whoa...!? 」

A strong fist “pierced my brain”! My eyes became blurry as they started to turn white! I was about to lose consciousness! But, somehow, I managed to stay awake!

「He...Hey...!? Why did you hit me too!? 」

Nevertheless, he didn’t show me his apologetic expression, and instead, he stared at me with eyes that looked like he was staring at an enemy.

「...Lista. 」

「Eh!? Wha...What!? 」

Although Seiya never showed much emotion, I could see that his face was blushing red.

「Right now, I am...deeply remorseful. In the first place, it was the heavenly world’s mistake to choose you to be in charge of summoning the next hero. Besides, you decided to save the SS-rank difficulty world without proper preparation...」

Wha...!? Wasn’t he too angry just now!? Don’t tell me that I was the cause that made him do the “Fist Rush” on other people!? Was it all because he was extremely angry with me!?

「The original plan was to raise the level up to MAX in the heavenly world, and then, go with Aria to show me the god that would train me. I planned to learn a new special skill before starting the quest to save this world...」

The atmosphere was heavy and stinging! Anyway, I decided to apologize!

「I...I’m sorry! I’m really sorry, Seiya...! 」

I sincerely bowed my head deeply in apology. Seiya spoke then.

「No, Lista. You didn’t do anything bad. This is my fault. 」

「Se...Seiya...!! 」

I was relieved! He was gentle after all! Somehow, he forgave me! Yes, that’s right! Because, we were connected by the red thread of fate...Right? Huh!?

However, on that moment, I felt an ominous feeling coming directly from Seiya. He looked at me with a demonic expression on his face!

Chapter 59: Fist and Promise (2)

At first I thought I was relieved to know that Seiya remained a kind person! But, I was wrong! Seiya gazed at me while he gritted his teeth as if he was a demon himself!

「Yes...It was all because of my sweetness...! It was my entire fault because I gave my heart to an "outsider" like you...!」

「Are you calling me an "outsider"!? 」

「Who else am I referring to besides you...? 」

His gaze was directed straight at me, and it was extremely cold. His eyes had absolute zero expression. They reminded me of his eyes during the Geabrande saving quest.

「No, no, it, it can't be!! Wait!! Wait a moment!! Seiya, don't you remember!? We have a deep bond that unites us from our previous lives...」

「Shut up. Summing up, why do you think it's necessary for us to have a romantic relationship? There is no need for us to be tied with something that happened in our previous lives. Besides, you are a goddess and I am a human. We no longer have that kind of relationship.」

「You...You're kidding, right!? Tell me you're lying!! 」

「For the time being, I will continue the quest to save this world because of the rotten past I have with you. But, don't get me wrong. This is not love. It's duty.」

「Ro...Rotten...! Du...Duty...! 」

No, this couldn't be happening! Even if he said those cruel words, I was sure that he still cared about me from the depths of his soul! I knew that for sure!

I activated my Appraisal skill to examine Seiya's true feelings.

★Lista's Heart-Throbbing Love Appraisal★

◎What is the degree of affection between you and him? 『2 points 』

◎What do you represent for him? 『Less than a weed 』

◎Word of Advice! 『It's completely cold. Repair is almost impossible. He desires a farewell as soon as possible!』

Whoaaaaa!! He was completely cold about his feelings for me!? And he viewed me as less important than a weed!?

I was utterly in shock. I slowly approached Seiya while shaking.

「No, no...! I don't like this...! We had great feelings for each other not too long ago...! 」

「Don't come near me. 」

「Please, remember!! We had some great glory days of our relationship!! 」

「That was the darkest history of my life. And, I told you not to come near me. I'll use my fist if you come closer to me.」

「Please, don't!! Seiya, you're mine!! 」

The moment I jumped to embrace him...

「...Ah...Ugh!? 」

Seiya's right hand pinched on my cheek straight away! He pulled my hair and my stomach received the blast of his knee!

「Ugh!? 」

Furthermore, his elbow pierced through my right breast!

「Wha...!? 」

I was beaten, kicked and smashed by his elbow...I fell to the ground after the triple combo.

「Uhuhh...Ugh...Ahhh...! 」

I fainted in agony. Next to me, stood Brut, who had somehow recovered from Seiya's fist impact.

「How...How could you do such a terrible thing...! You even used violence against your own comrade...! Hey, goddess! Are you okay?」

Brut seemed to be sympathetic towards me, after he saw that I received consecutive amounts of physical attacks. However...

...This...This chest pain...!! Hmm...It was nostalgic...!! And...the aftermath of my condition!! Okay...I got it!! Who thought that I would feel that exact same feeling all over again...!! The actions of the chosen one in a hundred million people!! It was the overly cautious and outrageously hero who saved S-rank difficulty world Geabrande, Ryuguuin Seiya!! *starts to laugh* Then...

laughs hysterically like a mad woman

「Hey, why are you laughing so much after getting beaten like that!? Don't tell me that this goddess is crazy too!？」

Brut's left my side abruptly. Then, Seiya carefully observed the inhabitants of the Light of Hope.

「Well then...Let's continue with my fist. 」

screams

The populace was in despair. However, on that moment.

「...Hero. Please, stop it now. 」

A young, but firm voice echoed around.

At the end of everyone's line of sight, including myself, stood Eich, the witch that had used earth magic to create the underground settlement.

Eich spoke after seeing what happened.

「Please, understand how everyone feels. They know that the real evil is not you, but the demonic monsters. Still, everyone here lost their comrades...they lost their families...their hearts are so sorrowful and painful that they have no choice but to direct their anger towards you.」

「Ah, Lady Eich...! 」

Someone muttered with a trembling voice. When I looked closely, I noticed that some of the people were shedding tears.

「Additionally, hero. You certainly swore before. You might not remember this anymore, but I know that you made a promise...」

Eich spoke while looking at the magical stones that made the ceiling sparkling with light.

「You said "I will defeat the Demon King and save this world". But...even so, you were the one defeated by the Demon King, and my brother met the same fate along with you...and he was killed trying to save the world...」

Tears overflowed from her eyes and fell to the ground. Eich, who behaved like a grown-up until now, started to cry like the child she really was.

「*cries* Brother...! My brother...! 」

「Eich...! 」

The people of the Light of Hope, including myself, were listening to Eich's crying voice without being able to help her. Then, the icy voice of the hero immersed under this circumstances.

「A promise to defeat the Demon King, huh. I was a totally fool back then. And, this is what happens when someone makes a stupid oath based on momentum with temporary and rashly feelings. An oath requires a perfect and sure chance of winning based on a carefully planned strategy.」

「No...But, you...you really swore that oath before...! 」

Brut was perplexed, and then, the answer was...

「Dunno. That "me" was not the "present me". Besides, I don't even know the real power of the Demon King. I can't promise to any of you that I'll be able to save this world.」

The atmosphere around them was dark and everyone was confronted with the reality that they faced deeply inside their hearts.

Under the heavy mood, Seiya approached a crying Eich.

「However...there is one thing that I can promise. 」

And then, Seiya raised his hand against Eich.

「Se...Seiya!? Don't do it!! That girl didn't do anything wrong!! 」

Like me, the people started to shout in unison.

「Stop!! Don't touch Lady Eich!! 」

「That's right!! If you want to hit someone, then hit me!! 」

The hero's great hand waved down. Eich took a small breath and closed her eyes.

Yet. Seiya just put his hand on Eich's head. He sent a sharp gaze directed at Eich and uttered the following words.

「Eich. Let me make you a real promise for the first time with the "present me".」

「A real...promise...? 」

Eich asked with a curious expression. Soon, an aura rose from the hero's body. All the populace of the Light of Hope forgot about their anger before, and just stared attentively at the hero.

「This town will be free from the rule of Bunogeos. 」

Chapter 60: New Profession

After the declaration of liberation, Seiya went to see Enzo the Baptist in order to change his profession. I followed the hero timidly.

「Oh. Hi, young man. Do you want to change your profession? 」

The old man Enzo smiled widely with almost no teeth on his mouth.

「Yeah. But, I have some questions first. Can I return to my original profession after I changed it for a new one?」

「Yeah, I can do that for you. It's all right. 」

「Are you sure? If you're lying, I'll tear you apart, okay? 」

Enzo's smile slowly disappeared.

「That's scary, young man. What you said just now and the way you said it was extremely scary. But, I'm telling the truth. If you come to me, I'll always be able to return you to your original profession.」

「Okay, the next question. If I come to you, will I keep the new profession I learnt while getting my original profession back?」

「No, you can't. You'll forget the new profession entirely when I return your original profession. Well, but I will remember which profession you got, so it's possible to get it again...」

Even after that, Seiya asked Enzo about changing professions in detail.

Seiya continued to ask about different professions. But, for me it felt too complicated. I wondered what kind of profession would be able to top the amazingness of a Magic Warrior. In Seiya's case, if he were to quit being a Magic Warrior, he could choose two different professions in exchange. But, if he did that, he wouldn't be able to use powerful skills such as Phoenix Drive and Phoenix Thrust...

「...So, these are the professions available. You can choose now. 」

After saying that, Enzo showed Seiya the options...

They were...

『Martial Artist; Spear Wielder; Wizard (Wind, Thunder, Light, Earth); Merchant; Fortune Teller; Pleasant Flute Player.』

He showed Seiya various kinds of aptitudes... Hmm, oh my, professions like Fortune Teller or Pleasant Flute Player were totally "discard jobs"! Ah...please, don't choose them! He needed to think seriously about this matter changing profession!

In order to beat Bunogeos...maybe "Spear Wielder"? I thought that this profession could allow for a range of possible techniques, such as powerful piercing skills like Phoenix Thrust. But, if he had to choose a different profession, then, the next one could be "Wizard". I thought it was relatively fine to keep "Fire" as the status quo. But, otherwise, I thought that "Wind" and "Thunder" were great attributes as well.

Nonetheless, Seiya told Enzo the following.

「First, I choose the Wizard. And, the magical attribute will be..."Earth". 」

「Eh! Earth magic? Isn't that the same as Eich? 」

That was unexpected. I was so surprised. On that moment, Seiya stared at me.

「What, it's you. You're here. 」

「Yes, I'm here!! Are you still angry!? You hit me, kicked me and crushed my chest!! Don't you think I deserve your forgiveness now!?!」

「Anyway, don't interfere with the profession I choose. 」

「But, why did you chose Earth magic? Is that magic even suitable for offensive attacks? Well, I guess there can some be beneficial techniques, if you find yourself in a location where there's an abundance of earth on the floor. But, even so, it's not a good idea to throw away your powerful Fire magic.」

「Shup up. Earth magic is my sub profession. The main one is different. 」

I see! Earth magic was intended to be used as aid! So, the main profession will be the one who will specialize in offensive powers! Yes, if that was the case, then...

Just when I felt relieved, Seiya spoke to Enzo.

「My main profession will be "Pleasant Flute Player". 」

「No, you're lying, right!? Flute Player!? You must be kidding, correct!? 」

I was astonished to hear that. The conversation continued regardless of what I felt.

「Okay, young man. Your main profession will be "Pleasant Flute Player" and your sub profession will be "Earth Wizard", am I right?」

「Yeah. That's good. 」

「No, no, wait a second!! Having Pleasant Flute Player as your profession won't do you any good!! It's impractical!! If you choose that as your main profession, your status will drop significantly, do you know that!?!」

Normally, Magic Warriors had formidable ability values, such as attack or defense powers. Because Seiya was a talented hero, his status was even higher than usual. If he chose to forsake his profession as a Magic Warrior, he'll lose the overall numerical value of his status. That meant that his powers would decline inevitably.

Even so...

「Okay, here I go, young man..."Profession Change"...! 」

Enzo's hands emitted a radiance. A bright light was generated and wrapped Seiya's body.

「All right. Your profession has changed. From now on, this young man will be a "Pleasant Flute Player" and an "Earth Wizard".」

「Wh...Whoa...! You really changed your profession...! Li...Listen, after all, isn't it better to restore your original profession back? Seiya, perhaps, do you still have a little "confusion" left on your brain?」

I was feeling a bit impatient about this. Then, Seiya turned his eyes to me.

「You've been noisy since a while ago. I wished you were sleeping. 」

「I'm not going to sleep! I'm worried, you know! 」

「I don't need your worries. 」

「What!? It's natural to worry about fellow comrades!! 」

「Who's the comrade. Originally, I didn't intend to bring you with me. 」

「...Ah!? 」

「You're useless. You can only use your own legs to walk. You'll stay here quietly.」

「I admit that it was my fault that you can't train in the God's realm anymore!! But, it's because that unfortunate event happened, that I want to be an extra help for you, Seiya!! 」

I was feeling frenetic about all of this. Yet, Seiya looked at me with cold eyes.

「Bunogeos has a Chain Destruction. In other words, that means that all the demons we'll meet in Exfolia will be able to kill us for real. I'm no longer as confident of protecting you as I was in Geabrande.」

「That's fine!! I will protect myself!! 」

「Even if you can die? 」

「I'm prepared for that!! 」

After a long silence...

「Do as you please. 」

Seiya murmured through his teeth. I nodded with a stern look, but I smiled in my heart.

grins discretely What did he think of me now? I showed him that I had a strong spirit! I was risking my life for this! Maybe he got in a good mood after he heard me, right? After all, we were sharing this risky life with one another! Okay! Let's save Exfolia with the love of our relationship!

I activated my Appraisal skill because I expected a great change of Seiya's feelings for me.

★Lista's Heart-Throbbing Love Appraisal★

◎What is the degree of affection between you and him? 『1 point 』

◎What do you represent for him? 『Less than a weed. Refuses to listen to anything a lesser weed has to say.』

◎Word of Advice! 『Considers your mere existence as annoying. He feels like wanting to grab you and throw you away forever!』

What!? He wanted to grab me and throw me away!! This didn't get any better, hey!!

While I was extremely sad and disappointed by this turn of events, Seiya started walking somewhere. I noticed that and I followed him quickly. Then, Seiya stopped in front of the tool shop. I whispered on his ear so that the shop owner wouldn't listen.

「Hey, listen, Seiya. Most of the tools on this shop are agricultural tools. They're not selling anything useful that will help on our quest, right?」

「Not really. 」

Seiya picked an "Iron Cylinder" that was displayed on the tool shop. He took away the small sachet that I received from the Great Goddess Isister. He took the coins from the sachet and bought it.

「This will become a flute if processed correctly. 」

「You're really serious about the Pleasant Flute Player... 」

「That's because I need a flute. But, not just a flute. I still have some more shopping to do...Hey, owner. I'll take thousand magical stones.」

「Yes, thousand magical stones. Thank you...A thousand!? Why do you want so many!?」

Seiya's unreasonable requests were a familiar sight to me, but the shop owner was extremely surprised. However, even if I was not that shocked, we didn't have enough money to buy what he wanted. Besides, there was no way we could carry that many magical stones with us. And just like the shop owner said, I didn't understand why buying a thousand magical stones would be that necessary. Somehow, I managed to calm Seiya and convinced him to only buying fifty pieces of magical stones.

Seiya bought a large luggage bag and filled it with the magical stones. But, now, he pointed to something that looked like a bottle of pickles from one of the shelves of the tool shop.

「Let's get emergency food and bottles with drinkable water. This is a priority.」

「About that...if you buy too many, everybody here will lose their share. 」

「We...We're sorry! We'll take what you sell for us! 」

Seiya put the emergency food and bottles with water on a newly luggage bag that he just bought. He gave it to me then. It was an elaborate preparation as if we were going to stay in a dungeon for a very long time.

After shopping, Seiya muttered.

「Next is equipment. First, I need an armor. And...just in case, but it would be better to carry a sword with me even if I have Pleasant Flute Player as profession now. However, Bunogeos took the Platinum Sword away from me.」

「I understand what you mean, but did you know that this place doesn't have any weapon nor armor shops?」

「What are you saying. There are weapons and armors here. 」

「Eh? Where? 」

「There. 」

Seiya was pointing with his fingers on Brut's direction. When he found out that Seiya was approaching him...

「Ah? What the hell do you want from me! 」

Brut wrinkled his eyebrows...

beating sound

Suddenly, Seiya hit him with his fist!

「Ah...Ugh? 」

Brut spilled foam from his mouth and fell down!

「Ehhhhh!? What did you use your fist on him!? 」

Seiya took off the armor from an unconscious Brut, and put it on himself. Moreover, he grabbed the scabbard with a sword and equipped around his waist.

「I got a steel sword and a steel armor now. 」

「You...You're terrible...!! 」

In addition, Seiya's eyes were looking fixedly at Brut's fellow men, who stared at him from the distance.

「That's right. I'll take a spare as well. 」

「What!? Somebody, help me!! 」

He chased them, punched them, let them faint, and then he took their belongings...He was far from being a decent human being at this point. However, I couldn't say anything because we needed supplies in order to save this world.

...It...It couldn't be helped. There was no other way than doing this atrocious thing...

Somehow, I was trying really hard to convince myself of this! On this moment, I felt a severe pain on my scalp!

screams

I felt that something tore apart! Seiya was pulling out my hair without warning me in advance!

「Wha...Wha...What are you trying to do!? 」

「I need it for the synthesis of a Platinum sword. Don't move. 」

「If that's the case, tell me first and then do it!! 」

—

「...So, we've got some tools and some equipment. What are we going to do now?」

I was rubbing my head as I listened to what Seiya had to say.

「We depart in the morning. You should try to find some inn to restore our strengths. As for me, right now, I want to examine my magic and remember some of the characteristics of my new professions.」

「Eh!! We're leaving tomorrow!? Is it okay to be that fast!? 」

We were talking about the cautious Seiya. So, I thought that he would want to do some self-training here for a long while!

「Don't worry. I have a plan. 」

「Re...Really? If Seiya says so...But, where are we going to spent the whole night? It looks like there is no inn on this underground settlement.」

「Just find somebody's house for us to stay. 」

「I wonder if there's a house we're allowed to stay? The people who live here don't like us.」

「Of course, there is. I'll find one. 」

Seiya started to look around. He found a weak-looking young man passing by and approached him.

「Hey. What's your name? 」

「Eh? My name is Caron. 」

「Okay then, Caron. Provide us with accommodation. One night it's fine. 」

「Ehhh!! No way, are you talking about my house!? You...You can't!! It's narrow and dirty!!」

「I don't mind. Where is your house? 」

「But...you...you know, it's really dirty. It's a truly bad house... 」

「Caron. If you are that dissatisfied with the house you own now...then, you can get out.」

「It...It can't be...!! 」

「From now on, I'll live there. 」

I held the shoulder of Caron who burst into tears.

「That...That's not it, Caron! One night! We just need one night! 」

「*sobs* Then...Then, I...I won't have...to leave my own house...? 」

「Of course! You don't need to leave! It's your own house after all! 」

「I am glad...! Actually, I am too fond of that house...! I am truly...relieved...!」

And so, we stayed at a house of someone we just met, and we restored our physical strength.

In the morning of the next day, we left Caron's house with large luggage bags on our backs.

「Okay. Let's go now. 」

「Ye...Yes... 」

We caused many troubles to the inhabitants and we left the Light of Hope.

...Ah. Of course, no one came to see us off.

Chapter 61: Pleasant Flute Player

We went up the long staircase illuminated by the magical stones, soon I saw a wooden board right above my head. If I opened the board, it would probably lead to the floor of an abandoned house.

However, just before exiting, Seiya put his hand on the wall in the middle of the stairs.

「Eh? What are you doing? 」

Suddenly, without a sound, a large cavity appeared in the soil-based wall!

While I was astonished, Seiya stepped inside.

「Se...Seiya!? Wait!! 」

I also went inside the cavity. Seiya took some magical stones out of the tool bag and illuminated the cavity.

It was a strange sight. The cavity itself was a very narrow space. It felt tight with just the two of us. But, when Seiya walked towards the front wall of the cavity, the wall transformed and created a new cavity. After I walked a while inside the continuous forming cavity, the place where I was until a while ago, closed and was gone. It was unlike digging a hole, because the soil moved along as we walked further inside.

「Amazing...! Is this Earth Magic? 」

「It's "Cave Along". It's possible to move freely inside the soil of the underground. 」

Seiya advanced through the underground while speaking with a lower voice. But, eventually, he slowed down.

「Currently, we are located around the abandoned house. We are about one meter below the ground.」

「Eh, I see... 」

Why was he suddenly doing this?...When I tried to ask him, he stopped and shook his head silently. He pointed overhead with his index finger.

When I looked overhead at the clay wall lit by the magical stones, I heard a muffled voice.

「...Do you think that the hero and the others came to this abandoned house?」

「...Yeah. I heard reports of people disappearing near the abandoned house.」

I had no doubts. The muffled voices were from beast men. We hid the sound of our breaths and listened closely to their conversation.

「But. We didn't find any humans the other time we investigated the abandoned house, am I right?」

「Of course, there won't be any humans inside. Lord Bunogeos says that some humans are capable of using magic of earth attributes. Even if they hid underground, there won't be a way to find them. It seems that the entrance can be open only if a human uses that magic.」

「Then, does that mean that the hero is hiding with them? 」

「We didn't search the ground properly yet. I'm sure he's here. 」

And then, the beast men laughed in a crazily manner.

「I will kill him once I find it! 」

「Yeah, its hero hunting! 」

When the conversation was over, Seiya proceeded walking silently through the soil. He looked at me and nodded in silence. It seemed that it was okay to speak.

「Hey, listen! We're being targeted! 」

「It's not surprising. We fled in the middle of the fight. Bunogeos must feel insulted right now. It's only natural for him to be looking for us with bloody intentions.」

「I was speaking about the beast men...They knew that someone like Eich was using Earth Magic as a mechanism to create an escape route under the floor of the abandoned house. They seemed to figure that magic only appears when a human uses it, just what happened with the staircase that led to the settlement of the Light of Hope...」

「What about it? 」

「That's obvious! It means that the enemy will surveillance the abandoned houses! How can we go back?」

「Of course, I expected that to happen. That's why we prepared good amount of food and magical stones in advance.」

「EH!? Does that mean we're going to spend time in a man-made cave!? 」

「That's what it means, basically. I would like to warn you that, even though we're underground, we're going to be surrounded by beast men from above the ground. Some of them have better hearing than others. You should avoid making noise unnecessarily. 」

「I...I understand. 」

I felt nervous about this situation, but I tried my best to answer with a lower tone. Nevertheless, at the same time, I was nervous in a completely different way.

What was this!? Were we alone in such a narrow place under the faint light...!? This was a great chance to regain his affection for me!! But, who knew that an adult development was coming this fast!? AHHH!!

In the midst of my excitement, Seiya put his hand on the soil of the wall.

「...What are you doing? 」

「I'm checking to see if there are any signs of beast men around here. 」

Then, Seiya stared at me face.

「Lista. You said you wanted to help me, didn't you? 」

「Ye...Yes! That's right... 」

Suddenly, Seiya bent down and grabbed my ankles! Seiya's face slowly approached my lower body part!

Oh...Oh gosh!! What's this!? What was he trying to do!? Don't tell me that...no, he can't...he isn't allowed to do naughty things to a goddess!! But...It's not like it was a bad thing to be honest!! Rather, I didn't mind that at all!! Yes, please take the whole thing off!! I'll gladly give you my everything!!

Yet, the next moment, I noticed that my body floated in the air!

「...Eh? 」

Seiya grabbed my ankles with a firm grip, and with his strength, he lifted me "very high"! Inevitably, my face approached the top wall made of clay in an instant!

...What!????

However...There was no shock of impact, as I feared. Surprisingly, it was a soft sensation as if my face thrust into water. And then...

I could see a purple sky right in front of my eyes! I was able to see the open space with a 360° rotation view! There was a sight of a desolate town! In addition, I could see the dog-faced and cat-faced beast men from the other side!

How...My head was stuck on the ground!

Whoa!? Wha...What the hell was this!????

I was on the verge of panic, because my head was dragged into the top of the ground!

yells with anxiety

My body trembled unceasingly with fear inside the narrow cave, yet Seiya spoke as if he didn't heard my excruciating screams.

「Hey, how is it? Are there any beast men around here? 」

「Eh, yes...I'm not sure if I saw them correctly, but I could see two of them around here...eh, wait a minute!! I'm not a "periscope"*!! What are you planning to do with this!! 」

「You said you wanted to help, right? I wanted to secure our safety in advance. If it's not safe, then I would have to pull you out of there immediately ...Okay. Well then, pay careful attention now because as I'll push us higher than this.」

When Seiya released the Cave Along, out bodies rose up and slowly surfaced to the top of the ground.

As soon as we emerged, Seiya looked at our surroundings. He found a shadowy spot and quickly ran towards that direction. From there, he listened the conversation between the two beast men. I could hear a beast man's voice on my ears.

「This hero hunting it's tedious and frustrating as hell, meow. When I get home, I'll eat my house slave to relieve my frustration, meow.」

The dog-faced beast man frowned upon hearing the words of the cat-faced beast man.

「Hey, hey. Did you forget that it's forbidden to eat humans in this town? 」

「But, it's rumored that Lord Bunogeos is eating humans in secret, meow. There's nothing to worry about, meow. Besides, we're in the middle of a hero hunting. Nobody will care if one or two slaves are gone during this time, meow.」

「I guess you're right. Then, how about you share half of that human with me?」

「It can't be helped, meow. I shall go now to prepare our feast, meow. 」

I whispered on Seiya's ears.

「Se...Seiya! The slaves are going to be killed! 」

「Don't panic. 」

Seiya took a shining elongated silver object from his chest.

「I'll blow this flute now. 」

「Ah...This is not the right time to blow some flute, don't you think!? People are going to be killed, you know!？」

However, I realized something. The flute that Seiya had on his hands was not of an ordinary design. There was only a hole at the tip and at the end. There were no holes on the side like ordinary flutes.

Seiya crouched down and tried to pick a bit of soil below his feet. He rolled the soil with his fingers to knead the clay.

「Wha...What are you doing...? 」

「I'm fixing this soil with magic. In addition, I'm getting this streamlined to eliminate air resistance.」

Then, I noticed an elongated and pointy object on Seiya's hands.

...It...It looked like a bullet of a gun that existed on Seiya's original world...It was so similar that it resembled a riffle's bullet...!

Seiya put it on the tip of the flute. And, he looked at the beast men standing a dozen meters ahead from us with a sharp eye.

「I lost many skills and magical techniques when I gave up on being the Magic Warrior. But, I learnt new skills to replace them. I have the "Tough Lung" skill, the "Continuous Whistling" skill; among others...I consolidated all of those skills as a Pleasant Flute Player into this blowing attack...」

Then, he placed the silver flute onto his mouth.

「Take this..."Burst Air" ...! 」

In a second...

bang

I heard a dry sound.

...I didn't know what happened. However, when I saw the front of the flute, on which Seiya put his mouth in, I got speechless.

The head of the cat-faced beast man, who was talking happily about his upcoming feast, disappeared without a trace!

「...Ah? 」

The dog-faced beast man, who noticed that the above of the neck of his fellow companion, his head was missing, said an idiotic remark.

「Ah, what? What happened to your head? 」

Nonetheless, before realizing the seriousness of the situation...

bang

Again, a dry sound was heard, and the head disappeared from the neck of the dog-faced beast man! Black blood overflowed continuously from the necks, and the two headless corpses fell to the ground at the same time!

I was terrified by the dreadful spectacle that happened just now.

No. This wasn't how a "Pleasant Flute Player" was supposed to act!!

「Se...Seiya!! What's that!? Isn't that a flute!? 」

「It's more like a blowgun than a flute. I used your hair to synthesize it last night, just like the way I did with the Platinum Sword before. It's called a "Platinum Blowgun", which increases the durability and also creates a deafening sound at the time of firing.」

「Platinum Blowgun...!! 」

Seiya didn't give me enough time to make a fuss. He went immediately to the beast men he defeated without paying much attention to the surroundings.

「What are you doing? What if they see us? 」

「It's certainly better not be here. But, I still have to clean-up this properly.」

「H...Here he goes again with his cleaning...! Even so, I think they're already dead by now...!」

「No. The beast men might resurrect from powers that are unimaginable to the human mind. I can't be reassured just by destroying the head. I have to completely destroy them.」

「But, you can't use Hell's Fire anymore, right? 」

「I know that. I will annihilate them safely and quickly with my new magic. 」

「What are you going to do this time? 」

「Do you want to know? Okay, let me tell you. 」

Suddenly, Seiya put his hand on my head. On this precisely moment...

slurping sound

screams My body sank to the ground! When I tried to grasp the reality of my situation, I noticed that Seiya's ankles were right in front of me! After all, only my head was stuck outside of the ground!

「What on earth are you trying to do!! 」

I was angry and yelled at my current situation because I couldn't move an inch. However, Seiya remained calm as usual.

「I have activated my Earth Magic with the intention to completely bury you alive. But, as you can see, only your head remained above the ground. I don't know why. Maybe I'm not very skilled at using Earth Magic yet. So, unfortunately I can only sink you down to this level right now.」

「How dare you say something dreadful like that!? Does sinking me have any sort of a different meaning!?!」

「Listen to me. You don't have any particular "Earth Magic resistance". However, you have some magical tolerance because of your existence as a living organism. That's why you didn't completely sink into the ground.」

After that, Seiya touched the headless bodies of the two beast men.

「"Endless Fall"...! 」

Soon, the two beast men swallowed into the ground and disappeared completely!

Un...Unlike me, their bodies were sunk entirely!? Ah...I see!! Their magic resistance was zero because they were dead!! There's where Earth Magic shows its full potential!!

「How deep did they sink to? Ten meters? 」

「No, way more. I don't know if there are thousands of kilometers to the core of this planet, but I sunk them further down anyways. If this goes well, they should be completely annihilated by the ultra-high temperature and ultra-high pressure generated by approaching the central nucleus of this planet.」

「Did you sunk dead bodies for thousands of kilometers in depth!? Isn't that too much!?!」

「I would feel more secure if I could see their annihilation before my eyes. But, unfortunately, I can't do that. Or I'll get annihilated in the process as well.」

Of...Of course you would get annihilated...! How could this person talk things like this with a bored expression...!

In a way, he substituted the burning of Hell's Fire with something equally frightening...

「Hey! I heard something! 」

「This way! 」

It were the voices of new beast men!

「It's bad, Seiya! We have to run away...eh, wait!! I'm still buried from my neck down, don't you see!?!」

「Don't worry. We're going to dive in. 」

Seiya immediately activated the Cave Along! My face, which was at the top of the ground, was abruptly swallowed inside the dirt and I dived below the ground!

「...Ugh!? 」

I fell into a narrow cave. Suddenly, I felt that I was going to be splashed with water, but Seiya took out the magical stones straightaway and lit the inside of the cavity.

「Okay. We moved to a safe place. I'll shoot the beast men again from here.」

As I followed Seiya around, I asked him fearfully.

「Li...Listen, Seiya. What is your overall plan for this? 」

「I already told you that I would free this town from Bunogeos' rule. After capturing targets with Cave Along, I'll perform a mid-range fire using Burst Air from a safe position to reduce the enemy's strength. In other words...」

The hero's eyes were crazy sharp even in the dark.

「It's beast hunting. 」

Chapter 62: Harsh Mole Life

After defeating two more beast men with Burst Air, Seiya returned to the underground cave. Seiya placed the magical stones on a narrow space about 1.5 meters in radius. He sat down on the ground. It looked like he was going to take a short break.

「Our goal is to kill 300 of them. We still have 296 to go. Lista. You'll be in charge of counting.」

「Ye...Yes. I understand. 」

We didn't know how many beast men occupied the town of Galvano. But, 300 was a number that Seiya stipulated himself. He was convinced that he could free this town if he defeated that amount of beast men.

「I'll aim for 50 bodies a day. We have to consider our current supplies, such as food or water. Therefore, I would like to get rid of the enemy within a week...Okay, let's continue. Are you ready?」

When I nodded, Seiya put his hand on the muddy wall. After he made sure there was no one around, he held my ankles and stood up. After being elevated, he put my face on the top of the ground. I started to look for the beast men. After discovering the enemy's position, Seiya hid at a distance and shot them with the blowgun. He killed the beast men without getting us in danger.

At first I was angry because I was being treated as a periscope. However, when I thought carefully about this, I realized that this job was my first collaboration with Seiya. "I'm useful as his companion"... I tried my hardest to find and report the enemy's location because I felt a great sense of fulfillment.

—

When the evening of the day came, Seiya placed his blowgun on the ground of the narrow cave.

「All right. I still have a lot of MP left, but we mustn't forget that our enemies are the beast men. Some of them are nocturnal, and when the sun goes down, the Burst Air hit rate declines considerably. We need to take this into account seriously. So, let's end the hunt for today.」

The hunting of the first day was over because of Seiya's cautious attitude. Still, today we killed 51 beast men. We surpassed the target we set for today. It was productive work.

We stood still in the underground cavity made by Cave Along. Seiya spoke after eating the preserved food he bought at the tool shop.

「Let's prepare for tomorrow and try to rest. 」

...Finally! We were going to spend the night alone...! Moreover, sleeping together on this narrow space...!

Just when my heart started beat much faster, Seiya stood up and placed his hand on the muddy wall.

「I can't heal the fatigue of my body in this narrow cave. I'll make the inside of this cave a bit wider in space.」

The narrow cave expanded without making a noise. It became a circular space with a radius of about 3 meters. He set a few magical stones on the ceiling. The artificial light brightened the entire cave. On that moment, Seiya drew a line on the ground with his scabbard.

「This is the boundary line between us. You're not allowed to enter beyond this line without my permission.」

「Wha...What's that line!! That's rude!! Are you saying that I will attack you, Seiya!?!」

「There's a possibility. After all, you suddenly hugged me before. 」

Damn! He found out!

「Listen carefully. If you enter beyond this line, I'll release the Cave Along and leave you inside of it.」

「That means I'll be buried alive...! Okay, I got it...! 」

Seiya laid down. But, I still had something to ask him about.

「Listen, Seiya. You know, about the...how about the toilet? 」

He said not to cross his line. Yet, he stood up and went to my territory as if it was something natural. And then, Seiya made a deep hole in the ground near the muddy wall with Earth Magic.

「Just use this spot. Once you finish, use the soil to cover it up. 」

「Are you serious...! I...I am a goddess, you know...! 」

「It's for the sake of saving this world. Endure it. 」

...The sweet life I imagined with Seiya was now far from reality. And so, my harsh mole life began.

—

Mole life, the second day.

I remained in the cave with the same artificial light, that brightened the space. That's why I didn't know that morning came up. Seiya shook my body violently and I woke up in distress.

「How long are you going to sleep. Let's go. 」

It was the same as yesterday. I became a periscope to find an enemy. Every time I spotted an enemy I warned Seiya about it, then would use Cave Along and shot the enemy from a distance.

「I discovered an enemy in the three o'clock direction! 」

After returning my head to the underground cave, I sent the new instructions to Seiya. This was done repeatedly until I became accustomed to this routine. By the end of the day, the number of beast men had killed approached 100.

Soon, I became proud of my role as a periscope. There was no shower, there was no toilet, and it was a miserable situation. Still, I felt a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment.

Maybe Seiya accepted me a little bit, because I worked very hard on this. Besides, I was entrusted with the management of the tool bag when I was underground.

Nonetheless...After a day of work, I heard shocking words coming from the hero's mouth.

「My skill in Earth Magic has increased. The periscope is no longer needed. 」

「Ehhh!? 」

「Look at this. The new Earth Magic, "Clear Ceiling"...! 」

When Seiya held his hand on the ceiling of the cave, the ceiling became transparent like a glass table.

「It's like a magical mirror. I can see the other side, but the beast men won't be able to see me on this side. I'll be able to see what's happening on the ground. I also learned the technique "Ground Through". This technique will make it possible to shoot the bullet of "Burst Air" through the muddy wall of the ceiling. In other words, I'll be able to see the enemy from the underground, while using the blowgun at the same time.」

「I...I see. That...That's great. 」

With Seiya's mastery of Earth Magic, the demand for a periscope diminished, and slowly but surely I lost my job...

In Seiya's world I wonder if I would be the milk delivery employee or the elevator girl?

—

Mole life, the third day.

Seiya kept destroying the enemy by combining the Clear Ceiling skill with Ground Through skill beneath the ground. It was safer and more time-efficient than using me as a periscope. The beast hunting went extremely fast.

And me on the other hand, I was having a tedious time. I was feeling a sense of emptiness because I had lost my job and, therefore, I lost my motivation.

Seiya didn't speak to me at all, except when necessary. If I tried to talk about something that was not important to him, he wouldn't even pay attention to me. In addition, Seiya didn't create a bath area because it could bring some unwanted noise...

My stress had reached its limit.

—

...That night, Seiya suddenly crossed the line and went to my territory.

After looking through the tool bag, Seiya glared at me with a harsh face.

「Hey, Lista. Why are our food supplies this low? There was supposed to be more in here. 」

「Ah...Sorry. I ate it... 」

That's right. I kept eating the food we had because I felt so much stress.

「Why? Goddesses don't die, right? Then, why are you eating more than I do? 」

「What! That's obvious! I get hungry even if I don't die! 」

I laughed a bit after I answered him. Yet, Seiya didn't even show a tiny smile.

「It...It's all right! We still have lot of food in here! We should be fine for the next four days based on my tiny estimate!」

「Don't be silly. One week was just a prediction. The war situation is constantly changing. There might be a time when we have to go underground for a longer period of time. I'm worried about the reduced food supplies.」

Then, Seiya muttered quietly.

「We have no choice but to find new ingredients. 」

He approached the muddy wall and stared fixedly at it. And then, after putting his hands inside the soil...

squeezing sound

In Seiya's hands was a big earthworm. It was about 10 centimeters in length and displayed sharp fangs. He placed it out right in front of my face.

「Hey. Eat this to see if it's edible. 」

「I...I can't eat something like that!! 」

「Just try it right now. 」

I activated my Appraisal skill afterwards.

『Death Earthworm...A living creature that resides in the underground of Exfolia. It is harmless if you don't disturb it. Also, this creature is edible... You can actually eat it. 』

Who...Whoa...It said I could eat this thing...! But, I don't want to eat a gross creature like this one....Definitely not...!

I shrugged my shoulders in a "fake" disappointment.

「I can't. It's completely impossible to eat. It's not edible at all. 」

Then, Seiya stared at me with icy eyes.

「You liar goddess...The results of the Appraisal skill says that "you can eat it". 」

「What!? How...How do you know that!? Do...Don't tell me that you've got the Appraisal skill as well!?」

「There's nothing you can do that I can't. 」

「You lied to me!! Cruel!! That's extremely cruel!! 」

「The cruel one is you. You don't deserve my forgiveness...Eat. 」

Seiya approached me with the horrible Death Earthworm!

「I...I don't want to!! I am a goddess!! I won't die if I don't eat the Death Earthworm!! So, there's no need for me to eat it at all!!」

However, Seiya forced the living Death Earthworm into my mouth!

distressing sounds

He moved my jaw up and down with his hands! And, I slowly chew the Death Earthworm! I felt an indescribable bitterness that spread all over my mouth!

「Ahhh...!! Ugh...!! 」

My eyes overflowed with tears. Still, Seiya spoke to me in a cold manner.

「From today on, your staple food will be Death Earthworms. 」

—

...At bedtime. Even if I closed my eyes, I could feel many Death Earthworms wriggling under my eyelids.

「Ugh...! One Death Earthworm, two Death Earthworms, three Death Earthworms... 」 My behavior became quite weird living under this harsh environment.

Chapter 63: Impatience and Irritability

Mole life, the fourth day.

Despite the miserable life underground, the beast hunting has progressed better than expected. If my counting was correct, the total number of beast men killed reached the 250 mark, it was a slaughter.

It seemed that his skills with Earth Magic improved greatly. Not only that. His profession as a Pleasant Flute Player leveled up as well. Besides that, Seiya acquired a new skill named "Delicate Flute Blowing". That allowed him to eject the Burst Air without any sound. His range was also extended. The blowgun was no longer a simple rifle. It was a sniper with a silencer. He was like a first-class assassin. He killed hundreds of beast men without leaving traces of his presence.

During this time, Seiya set out a new plan.

「I think it's time to reach the final destination of this hunting. Bunogeos. 」

...Although this hunting had been great so far, we haven't reached the 300 kills yet. At this point, I felt that something was off with his urgency in defeating Bunogeos. After all, we're talking about the cautious Seiya. However...

「Seiya. Are you, perhaps, thinking about the Cursed Sphere? Go to Bunogeos' residence and find the sphere...Is that your intention?」

If we destroyed the Cursed Sphere that Bunogeos had on his possession, then we could return to the God's realm and Seiya could restart with this training. I never thought that Seiya would risk his own safety in order to hunt Bunogeos this early.

However, Seiya only snorted his nose as he started to walk ahead with the underground cave expanding accordingly to his movements.

「Hey. Wa...Wait a moment!! 」

「I'm going anyways. Just follow me. 」

Seiya rushed ahead without talking too much. After seeing his back, something popped up inside my heart.

Don't tell me that Seiya...was tired of this harsh underground life just like me? Was that the reason why he became this desperate to defeat Bunogeos...?

Impatience and irritability. These kinds of feelings didn't bring good results that often. Still, I shook my head and appeased my heart.

No...Let's believe in Seiya! He was not confused anymore! I was sure that he had some kind of strategy!

This could be a great solution for me. Right now, all I ever wanted was to be released from this harsh mole life as soon as possible. There was no reason for me to oppose the Bunogeos hunting idea.

We left the abandoned house that we used for our hunting ground, and we headed towards the slave market. As the result of listening to the conversations between the killed beast men, our research concluded that the residence of Bunogeos was located near the slave market. They said that Bunogeos was using the previous human aristocrat's mansion as his living place.

After arriving at the slave market, we looked for a mansion through the Clear Ceiling from the underground. Before long, we found a large mansion on this part of the town, though it was in apparent deterioration. From its outer appearance, there was no doubt that this mansion was the one that the beast men spoke about.

Seiya didn't hesitate and advanced through the underground of the mansion.

「Is...Is this okay? There's no way that he'll find us underground, right? 」

I thought that our place was safe giving how cautious Seiya really were. However, if by any chance Bunogeos manages to find us that could become extremely troublesome. There won't be a guarantee that we'll get out of this alive. Bunogeos' statuses were far above from the other fallen beast men we've encountered so far.

Yet, Seiya was confident.

「No worries. Cave Along keeps evolving. In addition to soundproofing, we're now moving by a depth of 3 meters underground.」

「I see. That's why the scenery from the Clear Ceiling looked more distant than usual. 」

「Yes. If we have an urgent situation, it will be possible to dive into 10 meters underground. A normal attack won't reach us if we dive that much in the ground.」

After getting convinced by his words, I followed Seiya and we entered the underground of the mansion's floor. Although the Clear Ceiling was transparent, all we could see was a dark floor from above us. However, I could listen to something. It was the sound of someone walking in the floor. And then...

「Damn it!! That coward hero has been seizing my subordinates in the dark without showing himself!!」

I heard Bunogeos' angry voice.

Seiya sat down on the muddy floor of the cave. It seemed that he listened carefully to what Bunogeos had to say.

Bunogeos was a formidable enemy with a status comparable to that of the Warlord Emperor in Geabrande. There was no chance of winning against this type of enemy with Seiya's present status. Therefore, he was researching to find solutions for this problem even if he had to put himself at risk for standing below on the mansion of Bunogeos.

I listened to what he had to say as well. On that instant, there was an unsettling movement from Bunogeos' part.

「This...This is our Lord Grand Lion! 」

...Did he say Grand Lion just now!?

I heard the name of the demon that ruled the entirety of Radral continent. People said that his status was far higher than Bunogeos'. Apparently, there was only Bunogeos on this room. I could hear him say 「Yes. Understood. Yes. 」 , as if he was talking alone to himself. Nonetheless, he was using a crystal ball, and seemed to have a conversation at a distance. I thought the other voice from the other side of the crystal ball belonged to the Grand Lion, but I couldn't hear very well from this distance.

「Well, thanks to that damn hero, my fellow beast men have been decreasing a lot...Eh, how many of them were taken down? Let's see, I would say it was far too many...Ah...yes, next time I'll inform you correctly about the number of our losses...」

It seemed that Bunogeos was a bit puzzled to inform the correct number of defeated beast men. Suddenly, Bunogeos' voice resonated aloud.

「...Yeah! So, you're planning to send him! I see! Okay! That's why we don't fear heroes like this one! Yes, yes, by the way...! Ahhh! That would be great, indeed!」

I whispered to Seiya.

「Is...Is he talking about something serious...? 」

「Shut up. Don't talk to me now. 」

「I...I'm sorry. 」

I closed my mouth and tried to collect the information that I heard from Bunogeos' mouth.

「...Oink. 」

I heard a pig barking next to me. Of course, there wasn't any pig nearby. Only Seiya stood by my side. When I thought, I misheard it...

「Oink. Oink. 」

It was Seiya after all. Seiya spoke like a pig with his usual bored face.

「Oink. Oink. Oink. Oink. 」

...Hey, wait a moment. What the hell was this thing!? What has happened to this person this suddenly!?

I thought that his "state" became confusing again...So, I tried to activate my clairvoyance ability, but I couldn't see Seiya's status because he had activated the camouflage skill.

...When I finally thought that he moved from being "reckless" to "cautious", now he transformed into a "pig"...!? It was true that the harsh environment underground could affect one's mind....!!

I had gain a lot of depression from this harsh mole life that I no longer cared about myself. But, more than that, I was deeply concerned about Seiya's spirit, which seemed to be undermined...

—

Mole life, the fifth day.

When we finished the hunt for today, we came to Bunogeos' residence once again to hear what he had to say.

「Hey, Seiya. How is it going for you? Did you find out about Bunogeos' weaknesses? 」

I whispered on his ear, but Seiya remained silent. It might be frustrating to find a way to defeat Bunogeos without putting us at risk.

I cut a Death Earthworm in half and gave it to Seiya.

「Aren't you getting too fatigued over this? Would you like to try the Death Earthworm? It's actually delicious once you get used to it, do you know that?」

「I refuse. 」

「I see... 」

I felt lonely, as I chewed the Death Earthworm all by myself. Unexpectedly...

「Oink... 」

Seiya laughed in a vulgar voice that resembled the sound of a pig!

「Wha...Wha...What's wrong with you!? Why did you laugh suddenly with that strange and weird voice!?!」

「No. It's nothing. 」

This...This couldn't be happening!! This was not funny anymore!! There was no way that I was becoming this paranoid!!

I said, 「Once we get rid of the beast men, why don't we return to the Light of Hope through that abandoned house? 」 I proposed that path, but Seiya rejected my idea immediately. In this state of mind, I didn't know what else to do. Yet, I continued trying my hardest to find a solution to this bizarre situation...

—

Mole life, the sixth day.

Today, we stayed beneath Bunogeos' mansion to listen to what else he had to say.

Besides Bunogeos, I could hear new footsteps. It seemed that another beast man came to the mansion. Bunogeos' voice was high.

「Oh! So, you finally came! 」

「Yeah! Our Lord Grand Lion told me to come here with urgency! That's why I tried to fly here the fastest I could!」

「Well then, let's use your power to find that hero immediately! 」

「Yeah, and unexpectedly, I have a hunch that he might be near here! 」

On that moment...

high-pitch sound

I could hear a faint high-pitch sound that resonated on my earlobes. I could feel it because my audible range was higher than humans. Apparently, Seiya heard that sound as well.

「That beast man said he flew here. He's probably a bat-demon type...I don't know exactly what he did, but it seemed like an ultrasonic wave. He might have found the location of this Cave.」

「EH!? Even though we're underground!? 」

「Ultrasonic echolocation is effective under water and through the soil. 」

「We...We're in trouble!! Wouldn't it be better for us to dive deeper!? 」

「No. With Bunogeos power, there is a high risk that his attack will reach close to the 10 meters limit of Cave Along. We could be buried alive if it collapses.」

「The other day, you said "No worries", didn't you!? 」

「I said based on "if it's a regular beast man attack". More importantly, let's go now. If you fall behind, you'll be taken first by his attack.」

Seiya released the magic of Cave Along straightaway. Our bodies rose from the underground.

We reached a narrowly space between the floor of the mansion and the underground. When I tried to get out from there by crouching, the floor above me made a cracking noise and shattered in pieces!

「*yells* There you are!! 」

It was the bat-faced beast man! He distorted his mouth when he discovered the hole in the floor!

I said desperately, 「They found us! 」 , but Seiya was already carrying the blowgun! The Burst Air exploded at a close range when the bat-faced beast man peeped under the floor carelessly! The head of the batman was destroyed and his body collapsed!

Seiya stepped out from the hole on the floor, moved the headless body away from his path, and fired the Burst Air on Bunogeos' direction! He probably knew where Bunogeos was standing through the magic properties of the underground hideout. Bunogeos was astonished by Seiya's sudden strike. He didn't dodge the attack because his reflexes were slow on that surprising moment.

The bullet of Burst Air hit Bunogeos' head! Nevertheless...

「That hurt, you bastard...!! 」

Bunogeos cursed at Seiya while he held his head with his hands. When I looked closely at him, I saw that the bullet only made a slight injury. He wasn't bleeding too much.

「Damn it!! You were hiding in the basement of my house!! 」

...Bad. This was...This was extremely bad!! Burst Air was the only offensive technique that Seiya learned as a "Pleasant Flute Player"! And that technique was useless against Bunogeos!!

In a desolate, large room, Bunogeos grabbed the axe on his back. His fearsome weapon was aimed towards us. This weapon was the one with the Chain Destruction power.

「I won't let you escape this time...!! 」

Seiya couldn't use his powerful fire magic anymore! If we escaped using Cave Along, Bunogeos would surely destroy it and the ground would collapse, burying us alive!

「Wha...What should we do, Seiya! 」

When I looked closely at Seiya, I noticed that he put his Platinum Blowgun away!

Ah. Don't tell me that he gave up on this battle!? It can't be!! We're finished!!

Still, soon afterwards. Seiya held his hand in front of his face and muttered.

「Job Change...! From "Pleasant Flute Player & Earth Wizard" to "Earth Magic Warrior"...! 」

I was astonished when I saw Seiya surrounded by a dazzling light.

「Im...Impossible...You're kidding, right!? You can change your profession on your own without asking Enzo in the Light of Hope!?」

「There's nothing that prevents me from using that gramps' cheap skill. I've seen it once, and I've mastered it.」

What he said was tremendously rude. But, this hero's skills had a precedent of being acquired in a short span of time. For example, Elle's Fire Arrow or my Appraisal skill.

Did...Did he really changed his profession?...That's right!! I'll check it out by using my clairvoyance ability!! If he changed his profession just now, he probably didn't use his camouflage skill just yet!!

I tried to activate my clairvoyance ability to find out about his "newly" acquired profession...

Ryuguuin Seiya

Profession – Magic Warrior (Earth Attribute)

Level – 99 (MAX)

HP – 321960

MP – 88155

Attack – 293412

Defense – 287644

Agility – 268875

Magic – 58751

Potential – 999 (MAX) ...

I...I saw it!! So, he really changed his profession to Earth Magic Warrior!! And...Ehhhh!?

「No. Don't look. 」

Seiya noticed that I was using the clairvoyance ability on him, and activated his camouflage skill immediately. His status became like a sandstorm and disappeared from my sight.

Anyway, what Seiya said to me was true. Seiya changed his profession on his own.

Even so...there was something more surprising than that.

...Le...Level MAX!? Since when!? No, no...wait a second!! It made sense!! He killed lots of beast men within these last few days!! His level had this tremendous jump because of his "real training"!! Besides that, this "training" was combined with his "experience gain increase" by default!! That's why his level raised so much!!

It was natural that his level went up by going up against that many enemies. However, this hero probably didn't notice this because he never raised his level and ability value by increasing it in an ordinary way: defeating the enemy.

Without knowing what I thought, Seiya touched his glossy black hair.

「I achieved my goal of killing 300 beast men by defeating the batman. At the same time, the information extracted from Bunogeos is complete. There's no point in being here anymore.」

Bunogeos distorted his face when he heard Seiya's words.

「What are you talking about!? Aren't you ready to fight me here and now!?!」

「Ready, you say. Yeah, I guess so... 」

The cautious hero grabbed the Platinum Sword out of his sheath. It had been a while since he held this sword. He swung the sword back and forth brilliantly so that his arm adapted to its touch. After he became familiarized with it, Seiya pointed the tip of the sword directly towards Bunogeos.

「Perfectly Ready. 」

Chapter 64: Speech Suppression

...It's been a very long time since I've heard those words...!!

Seiya had defeated many fearsome enemies with his overwhelming powers after professing that particular line. But, I mustn't rest assured. Bunogeos was a terrible and formidable enemy. Bunogeos' agility value was weaker than Seiya's. However, the enemy's other abilities were somewhat equal to Seiya even at his level MAX. In addition, Bunogeos had skills such as "Evil God Protection" and "All Magical Attributes Reduction". He even had a weapon that could destroy our souls. I was sure that this would become a close fight just like the one against the Warlord Emperor. This was not an enemy to be underestimated.

...Seiya was the one to start the terrifying battle. He swung his sword at a transcendent speed by displaying the power of his level MAX, and aimed directly at Bunogeos...Instead of attacking the enemy, Seiya destroyed the table next to Bunogeos, who stood surprisingly still.

「Ehhh!? 」

I was so shocked by that occurrence. Everything that stood on the table shattered into millions of sparkling glass-like debris.

Bunogeos laughed.

「*grins* That's a pity. What you broke wasn't the "Cursed Sphere". It was just an average crystal ball on top of that table. The Cursed Sphere is hidden in a place where you won't be able to find it.」

"Attack Bunogeos with a sword to distract him and aim directly at the Cursed Sphere"...I thought it was Seiya's plan. However, even after knowing that that crystal ball wasn't the Cursed Sphere, Seiya didn't change his usual bored expression.

「I just destroyed your means of communication with the Grand Lion. I assumed you'd try to seek his help after getting in trouble at the end of this fight.」

「Wha...What did you say...!? 」

Bunogeos' eyes became full of rage and his nose convulsed because he was made a fool. Seiya swung his sword back and put it away on his sheath.

「Se...Seiya!? Why!? 」

「The sword will be used for the finishing blow. Until then, Earth Magic will be enough. By the way, I reached level MAX for the sole purpose of this fight. In fact, even if I was at a lower level, I'm sure that I can win this fight with certainty.」

「Ehhh!? Then, why did you spent three whole days tracking Bunogeos!? 」

I was amazed. On the other hand, Bunogeos' face turned bright red!

「Do...Do...Don't mess with me!! You bastard!! 」

He swung his axe and rushed directly on Seiya's direction! However, soon after, Bunogeos made a loud noise and fell down unexpectedly!

「Ahhh!? What!? 」

When I looked closer, I noticed that something was entangled on Bunogeos' ankles! It seemed like a thick rope at first glance...But, it moved! It looked like a strange brown snake! Before I knew it, the living rope extended from under the floor where we came out and tied itself to Bunogeos' legs without him noticing!

Wa...Was that...Earth Magic!? Yes, this type resembled the Automatic Phoenix!! It was a remote-controlled magical snake that only powerful wizards could create!!

The Earth Snake, entangled on Bunogeos' legs, lifted its head, opened the mouth and tried to eat the enemy's waist...

「This thing!! What the hell is it doing to me!! 」

When Bunogeos used his axe to destroy the eating snake, the earth-made animal transmuted its body into sand and scattered on the floor.

「*laughs* This wasn't a big deal! 」

Bunogeos showed a victoriously expression, but on that moment, the floor around him made a cracking sound and was torn apart! Dozens of Earth Snakes appeared from those cracks! Furthermore, more of those Earth Snakes came from the wall and windows!

Seiya spoke with a dull voice.

「Hundreds of Earth Snakes are surrounding the mansion. You cannot escape. Besides that, your fellow beast men won't be able to come here to save you. This place became a nest of Earth Snakes.」

Since...Since when did he make this incredible amount of Earth Snakes!?...I...I see! Seiya didn't waste those three whole days just to track Bunogeos with Cave Along! He took that time to create this amount of snakes using Earth Magic! And, he made sure that this power surrounded this mansion as well!

These Earth Snakes were crawling from the holes with astonishing numbers! There were holes in the wall, ceiling and on the floor! They appeared from everywhere! All of them approached Bunogeos with killing intent! My spine froze at sight of this creepy scenario! This looked like a devil's attack! It no longer looked like a brave hero's skill that was meant to save the world!

The hundreds of snakes jumped all at once to Bunogeos. On that moment...

「Don't take me lightly!! "God Chopper"!! 」

Bunogeos started wielding his axe fiercely! The Earth Snakes, which were about to eat Bunogeos, turned to dust and scattered on the floor by the wind pressure of his weapon!

「Wha...What a fearsome power...!! 」

I was astonished. The force from his attack destroyed dozens of Earth Snakes in a blink of an eye. Bunogeos saw how successful he was and smiled wickedly.

「Those are snakes made of magic. Once they return to the soil, they won't be able to regenerate anymore...」

Bunogeos' other hand, the one without the axe, touched his chest and removed all of his upper steel equipment.

「Eh!! 」

I was surprised when Bunogeos removed his breast armory! A huge mouth stood between his chest and his stomach! It had teeth and it was widely opened!

「I'll swallow all of your Earth Snakes!! 」

Swa...Swallow!? He must be joking, right!? No...No way...!!

I turned my eyes on Seiya's direction to seek his help.

「What should we do, Seiya!! He wants to swallow us into that mouth, right!? 」

「I guess so. This technique is one of his skills. Okay, Lista. It's your turn. 」

「Eh!! Me...Me, you say!? What on earth are you suggesting!? 」

「Sink. 」

「Eh? 」

Suddenly, Seiya shook up his arms...

beating sound

His fist pierced through my brain abruptly!

「Ahhh...Ugh!? 」

slurping sound

After receiving the powerful fist of the mighty hero, my body fell to the damaged floor and was buried into the soil!

「You...You...You...Why did you do this to me!! 」

I screamed at Seiya after I saw that the lower half of my body was buried. At that point.

「Die!! “Vacuum Shredder”!! 」

After Bunogeos command, the large mouth between his chest and stomach made a weird noise! Soon, everything in the room, including the Earth Snakes started being sucked into that mouth at a tremendous speed! It was so noisy that it shook my ears! The swallowing force was so strong that my prideful blonde hair was about to be sucked as well!!

「Whoaaaaa!! 」

Bunogeos didn't want to just swallow us! He wanted to destroy our souls by using his axe with the power of the Chain Destruction the moment we approached him!

...Bad!! This was extremely bad!! We're going to be killed!!

I was impatient, but I managed to endure Bunogeos' vacuum power because my lower half was buried in the ground! And...Seiya was the usual Seiya as always! He grabbed my shoulders, since I couldn't move, preventing him from being swallowed by Bunogeos!

「Hey...Wait a second!! What are you doing!? I'm not a “supporting stick”... 」

Although I tried to scream at him, I realized that my situation was similar to a romantic setting. It looked like Seiya hugged me from behind my back.

Wha...What...? Wait, this was...actually, great. Somehow, it felt nice...Yes, I'll let it be. Yes, I'll be a supporting stick. I shall support him firmly so that he won't fall down. Because, I was a stick.

My head turned into a field of flowers for a brief moment. But, soon, I was quickly brought back into reality.

...The numerous Earth Snakes that filled the room disappeared in an instant! I didn't see even one of them anymore!

Bunogeos stopped his vacuum power. After closing the large mouth on his stomach, Bunogeos laughed with satisfaction.

「*grins* I turned everything into pieces! 」

He...He was a terrible monster after all! Seiya won't have a choice but to use his sword to fight seriously against him! But, this monster had the Vacuum Shredder! We won't be able to do anything when he activates that power! How could we fight against this formidable opponent?

Contrary to my dismay, Seiya released his hands from my shoulders and faced Bunogeos without any sort of defense mechanism.

「Se...Seiya!? You can't let go of me!! You'll be sucked in if he activates the Vacuum Shredder again, you know!？」

「There's no need to worry about that. The outcome of this match is evident. 」

Then, Seiya spoke in a lighter tone.

「Bunogeos. You seem to think that you crushed and destroyed all of the Earth Snakes. But, you're wrong. It looked like you destroyed them, but the Earth Snakes that you swallowed were mixed up with the sand that you sucked in as well.」

「Ah? What did you say? 」

「And, that's happening right now. All the soil and sand that you swallowed into your stomach have transformed back into Earth Snakes.」

「Yo...You...!! It...It can't be...!! 」

「Your "outside" is protected by the skill of All Magical Attributes Reduction. But, I wonder if your "inside" is protected as well or if it's unexpectedly fragile?」

Bunogeos looked at Seiya with an angry face! On that moment, Seiya shouted with an unsympathetic gaze!

「Eat this..."Transform Automatic Naga*". 」

Soon, Bunogeos' stomach swelled up! It looked like several long and thin sticks were trying to pierce out from his skin! I wanted to close my ears because the sound of ripping meat was too unbearable for me to take...

agonizing screams

The Earth Snakes broke from the inside of Bunogeos' body!

scary screams

I screamed when I saw that horrifying scene! The Automatic Naga came out from everywhere except his limbs! They crawled out, tore his flesh and he bled incessantly!

When the last animal crawled out from the body, Bunogeos vomited black blood from both of his mouths in the head and stomach! His huge body fell dramatically to the floor!

...Bunogeos didn't move an inch after a long while.

「Is...Is it over? 」

「Yeah. 」

Seiya grabbed my head with one hand and pulled me out from the ground without mercy!

「*yells* How dare you pull me off abruptly like that!? Am I a radish in a crop!? 」

I got angry at the bad treatment I received, but Seiya ignored me as always. I tried to calm down. And I changed my bad mood in order to admire him for defeating Bunogeos.

「Anyways. It was amazing, really. You defeated Bunogeos without using your sword. Moreover, it was a complete victory without much danger. Your Earth Magic is incredible...」

「I guess so. I think this magic is better at the deceiving the enemy than any other magic. If one uses this magic well, then it will be possible to defeat an enemy with great status.」

「Ye...Yes! With this type of magic, you'll be able to defeat the Grand Lion without much problem!」

「It's too early to say that for certain. It won't do any good to use only Earth Magic from now on. I have to learn other abilities. For that purpose, I need to go to the heavenly world. I have to destroy that Cursed Sphe...re...」

「Ah! About that! Where is it? Bunogeos said that he hid that on a place that we won't be able to find it...」

I became worried. Therefore, I tried to look for it on his room immediately.

Before I knew it, the large body of Bunogeos was standing up!

「Se...Seiya!! He's alive!! He's still alive!! 」

A cautious Seiya told me that "the outcome of this match is evident"! That's why I believed on his words without any doubts! Bunogeos was alive even after his body was ripped from the inside! He was bleeding black blood endlessly! His life force was unbelievable! Yes, that's why Exfolia was named a SS-rank difficulty world! Both Seiya and I forgot about it! How conceited we were!

「Not yet...It's not over yet...! 」

As he spoke, Bunogeos thrust his right finger into his left eye!

「Whoa! 」

That was a terrifying scene! Bunogeos pulled his left eyeball with his finger!

「*laughs crazily* This is...the "Cursed Sphere"...! His Lord the Demon King inserted it on my body...! This sphere possesses enough magical power to enclose the whole town with a spell barrier...If I swallow this power, my ability will improve dramatically...! 」

And then, Bunogeos placed his eyeball...no, the Cursed Sphere into his mouth!

「This will be your defeat because of your irrational actions and recklessness!! Just look at this amazingness!! This is my second form!! It's called "Beast Hazard"!!」

「Se...Seiya!! 」

I was getting to anxious. However, unlike me, Seiya was not that disturbed by this occurrence.

「A second form. I thought this could be interesting. But, is there's anything special about it? I'm not that surprised but I'm a bit confused. If you intended to beat me, why didn't you eat your eyeball from the beginning to power up? If you did that, then your chance of victory would've increased a little. Well, anyways, I just need to prevent you from going any further than this.」

Just when Bunogeos put his eyeball inside his mouth...

cough

Bunogeos' throat got swollen! Something came out from Bunogeos' throat and ate the Cursed Sphere that went inside his mouth! While holding the sphere, this thing arrived on Seiya's foot!

「I told you before. The outcome of this match is evident. 」

Like Bunogeos, I was at a loss of words at the sight that happened right in front of my eyes!

What held the Cursed Sphere was...an Earth Snake! The snake appeared from Bunogeos' mouth, stole the Cursed Sphere, and gave it to Seiya!

「It...It can't be....!! There was one left inside the body...!? How...!? 」

「Bunogeos' HP is high. There was a possibility that he wouldn't die even if the Automatic Naga inflicted a fatal injury on his body. Therefore, it was necessary to keep one snake behind just in case a half-dead Bunogeos decided to counterattack. Well, it was just a precaution.」

The snake made a sound and crushed the Cursed Sphere when Seiya gave a sign with his finger.

Bunogeos showed an expression of fear and he stepped back.

「Wha...What's this...! Who...Who the hell are you...! 」

「I destroyed the Cursed Sphere. And now, just as I promised, I will kill you with my sword.」

Seiya drew the sword from his sheath and took a small breath. The Platinum Sword reacted to Seiya's breathing sound and shined brightly. The air vibrated in the room.

It didn't inflict any damage. But, it felt like death itself. I had no idea how to describe this feeling. On the other hand, Bunogeos yelled loudly.

「You're naïve if you think you've won just by defeating me!! His Majesty the Grand Lion will visit Galvano in the evening!! You won't stand a chance!! This kind of small tricks won't work against the overwhelming power of the ferocious beast emperor!!」

Seiya held the Platinum Sword with both hands and pointed the top of his sword against the enemy. Before long...

「Atomic Split Slash...! 」

The magical sword slash that I often saw in Geabrande was resurrected in Exfolia! The moment the sword stroke on the top of Bunogeos' body, a roar was heard and a shockwave was felt! It was just like a big explosion!

The floor of the mansion was greatly destroyed and a huge crater was created on the ground... In the middle of the crater stood a lifeless Bunogeos...

「It looks like he's dead...But, let's strike him two or three times more, just to be sure. 」

Again, an unforgiving and unstoppable attack was done just like before...

—

Seiya used the power of his Atomic Split Slash at his level MAX. But, Bunogeos was still intact.

I activated my clairvoyance ability without hesitation. It confirmed Bunogeos' death. Even though he was dead, Seiya continued to use his Earth Magic powers against the corpse of the enemy. Seiya decided to send the corpse into the abyss of the Endless Fall alongside the axe with the power of the Chain Destruction.

「Hey, listen, Seiya! The Grand Lion is coming here! Isn't it better for us to run away now? 」

However, Seiya didn't show any panicking emotions. Instead, he put the finger on his chin. It looked like he was thinking deeply about something.

「He decided to inspect Galvano after his conversation with Bunogeos just the day before. It looks like this enemy is a very skeptical one. Well...It's just an assumption.」

Finally, Seiya instructed me to open the portal to the God's realm. I tried to open the portal carefully.

「Ah! The white barrier inside the portal is finally gone! We will be able to return! 」

「Bunogeos said that the Grand Lion would arrive in the evening. That's about one hour from now. Assuming that he might come earlier than expected, I should train for about 30 min in the God's realm. I have to learn new abilities in order to defeat the Grand Lion.」

30 min...In other words, two days accordingly to the different flow of time in the God's realm. I wondered if it would be okay with just that amount of time. No...Let's enjoy the current momentum! Finally, I will be able to return to my home, the God's realm! I won't have to eat Death Earthworms anymore! I will have a toilet to sit on and I will be able to take a bath!

I went through the portal while I smiled vigorously at Seiya.

「I'm glad! I'm finally free from the underground life! Seiya! You must be happy too! You started to get crazy as well!」

「Whom are you talking about. Don't compare me with you. 」

「There you go again! You were laughing like this "oink oink"! I'm sure that I heard you correctly! It looked like you lost your mind!」

「That was for the future. 」

「I see. Ah? What does that mean? 」

It was only after we returned to the God's realm that I understood the meaning of Seiya's words...

Chapter 65: The Goddess of Change

After crossing the portal, we arrived in the courtyard of the God's realm.

From the intense evil energy of Exfolia to the pure aura of the God's realm. The gap was tremendous.

「Ah! We finally came back! 」

After inhaling and exhaling big amounts of fresh air into my lungs...

「Lista!? 」

I heard a familiar voice and I turned around. In the middle of the courtyard...Aria stood under a garden table with a parasol. She looked at us with surprising eyes. She stood up from her chair and came running on my direction.

「I was worried about you all this time! 」

I remained in Exfolia for nearly a week before coming home. That means that it has been two years in the God's realm because of the different time flow. The gods living in the God's realm, including myself, had eternal lives. Their sense of time was different from human beings. For gods, it didn't matter much how many hours or years it takes. However, Aria had tears in her eyes and looked extremely delighted to see me again.

「The crystal ball didn't show anything about Exfolia and I heard that the enemy had weapons with the power of the Chain Destruction...I was so worried about you two!」

「Thank you, Aria! But, somehow, everything went okay! 」

Aria smiled at me. Nonetheless, after seeing our outer appearances, her smile faded away and she looked quite sad.

「Really? Even though you look so worn-out? 」

I lowered my eyes and looked at my body. I was covered in mud and my skin was dirty because of the long underground life. Then...

「She's right. You don't look like a goddess... 」

「And...the smell is terrible too, Li...Lista... 」

I heard familiar voices. When I looked up, I saw both Celseus and Adenela. They pinched their noses as they approached me.

「No...No, I'm like this because I lived under the soil for a long time! 」

The three of them looked closely at Seiya without paying attention to my excuse. Likewise, Seiya looked dirty...

「Seiya looks...somewhat wild! 」

「Ye...Yes. So...So cool. 」

「His vibe is totally different from Lista's. I feel like her bitterness has increased. 」

「Wha...!? Why!! 」

I shouted at them.

Seiya lived in the same harsh environment as I did, but even so, I was the only one dirty and stinky!? I didn't understand the reasoning behind all of their remarks!!

When I got upset, Celseus gave me a cup of steaming coffee.

「Just drink this. It's an Espresso. 」

Suddenly, I noticed a difference in Celseus' attire. He wore a vest and had a bow tie on his lapel.

「Why...Why are you wearing those clothes? 」

「Ah, this! Actually, some things happened while you two were gone! I finally started the cafe shop that I desired so much! It's called "Cafe de Celseus"! It's a wonderful place where everyone can relax for a moment! 」

「Is...Is that so... 」

If I looked closely at my surroundings, I could see that several garden tables scattered around in the courtyard. It looked like an open cafe.

That's why both Aria and Adenela were gathered in the courtyard...But, wasn't Celseus the Swordsman God? Why did he become a cafe's master? Well, if everyone was okay with that, then I guess it was acceptable...

After serving me a hot coffee, Celseus offered me something that looked like several "branches of a tree".

「It's my new churros! They're delicious! 」

He even grabbed my hand by force!! He put the plate on my hand immediately!!

I usually didn't eat his food. But, I was extremely hungry. I ate the churros that he presented to me on a plate.

「How...How is it? Are they good? 」

「Delicious! They're delicious! 」

「Really!! 」

「Yes! They're far better than Death Earthworms! 」

「I see. I'm glad...Wait, did you say Death Earthworms!? I don't know anything about that, but I'm not that thrilled to have that sort of comparison with my food!!」

Celseus looked at me with distrustful eyes. I coughed when the mood changed between us. Therefore, I moved sideways and presented some of the churros on a plate to Seiya.

「Aren't you hungry? Would you like to try this out? 」

However, Seiya looked at the plate with scornful eyes.

「I don't want death churros. 」

「Why did you call them "death churros"!? They're normal and delicious churros, you know that!？」

Seiya looked directly at Aria after ignoring a screaming Celseus.

「Aria. I want to practice with the god I asked you before. Is it possible to go now? 」

「Ye...Yes. We've talked about that a long time ago, but... 」

「Let's go then. 」

「Wait...Wait a second, Seiya!! Don't you have to change your clothes!? Don't you want to take a bath first!？」

「I'll leave that stuff for later. 」

Seiya walked out with Aria, leaving behind a very upset Celseus, who held his "death" churros on a plate, and a sad Adenela, who wanted to talk with Seiya for a bit longer.

—

「I think it's okay to take a little break once in a while... 」

I tried to complain with a proper reasoning. And yet, I was completely ignored.

At this precise moment. Seiya followed Aria, who climbed a soft slope of a mountain.

We were heading for the "Heavenly Mountain of Seclusion" from the God's realm.

I've seen the majestic sight of this mountain from the temple, but I never climbed it before. I've heard that gods skilled with the art of *senjutsu** inhabited the "Heavenly Mountain of Seclusion".

After walking for a while by stepping pebbles, we arrived at a hut on the foot of the mountain. It resembled a log house.

Aria knocked on the hut's doors.

「Rusti. It's Aria. Are you inside? 」

I followed both Aria and Seiya, who entered the hut instantaneously...When I stepped inside; I was so surprised that I fell back immediately.

There was a cyclops inside the hut!

「Ehhh!? Why is there a monster in the God's realm!? 」

Yet, soon as he grabbed a book on the bookshelf, the cyclops glittered with light. Then, the large body of that monster shrank in an instant. When the light faded away, I saw that a girl stood there with a book on one hand. It was a young girl like Eich of the Light of Hope. Still, she wore a silk garment and behaved like an adult woman.

The girl explained after she saw my astonishing expression.

「The bookshelf is too tall for my height. That's why I changed into a cyclops. 」

Aria smiled and introduced her.

「This is Rusti, the Goddess of Change. 」

「Goddess of Change...? 」

When I gazed at Seiya in a confusing way, he began to explain as if it were bothersome.

「Exfolia is a world full of monsters. So, originally, I wanted to master the art of change before starting the quest. I thought it would be safer if I transformed into a monster myself. Well...that was the original plan until someone screwed it up.」

I was embarrassed and I kept silent. Yet, Seiya continued to stare at me.

「That "someone" is...you Lista. It was your fault. 」

「I...I perfectly know that!! You don't have to constantly remind me of that!! 」

I wanted to change the topic, so I approached the young girl. I bent my knees and showed her a smile.

「Well, nice to meet you, Rusti! I am Listarte! You can call me Lista! 」

Soon after, Rusti wrinkled between her eyebrows.

「Hey you, how dare you treat me like an idiot? I am a superior goddess unlike you. 」

「...Eh. 」

「Lista! Rusti is a goddess who has lived for ten thousands of years! 」

「Is...Is that so!? I...I...I'm truly sorry!! 」

But, I...I didn't know about that! Both her appearance and voice resembled those of kindergarten children!

Rusti looked at me with repulsive eyes.

「You're full of dirt and you stink. Are you, perhaps, the "Goddess of Filth"? 」

「I...I'm not!! I'm a Goddess of Healing!! 」

I tried to deny it desperately. Then, behind my back...

「Get out of my way. Goddess of Filth. 」

At the same time, I screamed after the shock I received on my buttocks!

「Ugh!? 」

Seiya kicked my butt and I rolled to the other side of the hut!

「Eh!? You two aren't getting along well!? 」

「About that...many things happened since then...it seems that I'm less than a weed now. 」

Aria looked astonished because Seiya kicked me in the butt. I tried to explain in a reasonable way. And then, Seiya spoke to Rusti as if nothing happened.

「A question. Can I become transparent by using the art of change? 」

「That's impossible. I've only transformed into a person or monster so far. And, of course, the abilities and status won't change just because you transformed into something else. 」

「Hmm. That's fine. Well then, I'd like to learn the art of change as soon as possible. 」

「Okay. If you have the proper qualities of a hero, I think you'll be able to master the art of change in one week.」

「No way. I want to learn it within 10 hours. 」

Soon, Rusti's face became clouded.

「Don't underestimate the art of change. Disguise and change are different. Voice, smell, physique, presence...This divine skill has the power to transform into anything, even into our enemies. You can't learn it overnight.」

Rusti rose her tinny arm on our direction.

「Just observe. You must remember the monsters that lay within your subconscious...And then, you invoke a spell of this skill...」

After the spell was cast, Rusti's arms glittered and they transformed instantly into a mighty cyclops' arm!

「It takes at least three days to do this. It seems easy, but, in fact, it requires a considerable effort to make it happen.」

Nevertheless...

「Is that so? 」

Seiya transformed his arm into a cyclops' arm exactly the same way like Rusti's spell.

「Yo...You...Have you learnt the art of change? 」

「No. It's the first time I'm using it. 」

「Actually, it's harder to change your voice! You need to cast this spell while recalling your opponent's voice...Then, your voice will change into a thick voice like, for example, a cyclops' voice...」

Rusti began to speak in a lower tone that resembled a cyclops' voice...

「Oh. Do you mean it like this? 」

Seiya's voice transformed immediately into a cyclops' voice.

「Wha...Wha...Wha...Wha...What...!? 」

—

...Aria and I left the hut with a peace of mind. We smiled at each other while walking down.

「He'll be able to master that skill quite quickly! 」

「Yes! Maybe he won't even need the 10 hours! 」

Seiya's formidable learning abilities were no longer surprising to Aria. But, Rusti was so astonished that her eyeballs almost popped out from her face...

「Ah. That's right, Lista. You must go to Lady Isister's room. She wants to talk with you. 」

「Eh? What is it? 」

「I don't think it's anything bad. It's okay for you to take a bath first and get dressed up before going to see her.」

After descending the mountain, I returned to the temple and took a hot shower in the bathroom. I changed into a clean dress, arranged my hair and I headed to the Great Goddess Isister's room.

—

「Listarte. I'm glad you're safe. 」

As usual, the Great Goddess Isister sat on a chair while she knit pleasantly. She gave me a warm smile upon my arrival.

「I apologize for making you worry. 」

「I heard from Adenela. She told me that the enemies in Exfolia had weapons with the power of the Chain Destruction...」

The Great Goddess Isister hardened her expression after saying those words.

「There's one thing that bothers me. The mist that covered Exfolia disappeared for a brief moment when you destroyed the Cursed Sphere. I could see some of that world through my crystal ball. However, I couldn't feel the presence of the Demon King Artemaeus.」

「Wha...What does that mean? 」

「I don't know. Even now, I can't feel anything from there. Yet, I have a premonition that horrible things are about to occur...」

Afterwards, she slowly stood up from her chair.

「I think saving Exfolia is beyond the rules of your punishment. Let's head to the almighty world of the innermost gods. I'll ask them to reduce your punishment.」

「Thank...Thank you very much! 」

I was deeply grateful to the Great Goddess Isister for her kindness. The Great Goddess Isister was gentle like a mother. However...will it work?

The almighty world of the innermost gods...I never been there myself even though I knew it existed. I also didn't know where it was.

—

The Great Goddess Isister went to the "room that stops time". That place stored all of the god's souls that lived an eternal life. No one was permitted to access without proper authorization, except for the Great Goddess Isister.

The Great Goddess Isister cast a spell to unseal the door. As soon as I stepped inside, I felt a soft and mysterious feeling.

「This way. 」

I walked quietly behind the Great Goddess Isister. I saw countless of shelves in a row containing the souls shining "lamps". After walking for a while, the shelves ended. At the end of the corridor stood a large decorative painting displayed on the wall. The mysterious painting showed a winding road that connected a temple to a cliff.

「This place is the almighty world of the innermost gods. 」

「Eh? 」

The Great Goddess Isister held my hand and walked towards the painting!

「Whoa!? 」

I went inside the canvas... I realized that I was on a winding road. On the other side, I saw that a temple that stood on a cliff. We went inside the painting for real.

We walked on a path that led to the stone steps in front of the temple. Then, the Great Goddess Isister stopped and knelt down. I imitated her and knelt down as well.

「Our innermost gods, the three pillars of our world...Brahma, the God of Creation. Nemesil, the God of Reason. Chronoa, the Goddess of Time...I am Isister, the high-ranking deity in charge of the God's realm. I, thereby, stand by your presence to request an audience with you...」

I could hear a majestic voice of a male god that came from the depths of the temple. Yet, I didn't see any physical form.

「What do you want...Isister. 」

「Lord Nemesil, the God of Reason. I have a sole wish to make. It regards the punishment given to goddess Listarte. She was sentenced to save the SS-rank difficulty world Exfolia without any of her powers. However, this punishment restrains the possibility of a triumph.」

...The Great Goddess Isister explained that the enemy of Exfolia had weapons that could destroy the souls of gods by activating the Chain Destruction. Continuing with the quest meant that the real soul would be in permanent danger. It could be destroyed forever. However...

「Isister. The judgement is absolute. It won't change. Listarte and Ryuguuin Seiya will have to save Exfolia on those circumstances.」

After we heard that harsh voice, the Great Goddess Isister responded with a calm tone.

「Then, wouldn't it be better for goddess Listarte to retain her powers at least? 」

「No. That's a punishment. She won't be forgiven. 」

Her request was denied immediately. On that moment...

「Nemesil. Aren't you too harsh on them? 」

I could hear a goddess' voice that emerged from the depths of the temple.

「We, as parents of all gods, have a duty to protect our children. Although saving Exfolia is an unchangeable punishment, some exemptions are necessary as long as the enemy has a weapon capable of killing gods.」

「Goddess of Time, Chronoa. Are you against the punishment order that I have appointed as the God of Reason?」

「Well then, Nemesil. Are you okay with this even if our children are killed? 」

「That's not what I was saying. 」

「Yet, you didn't deny what I was saying to you. 」

The ethereal atmosphere turned into a divine quarrel between the innermost gods. Soon, a neutral voice echoed unexpectedly.

「Both gods. Calm down. 」

Then, both Nemesil and Chronoa became silent like water.

The Great Goddess Isister whispered on my ear.

「The foremost authority of the three pillars of our world. It is Lord Brahma, the God of Creation...」

This new voice belonged to our Supreme God...Brahma, the God of Creation!!

The tension increased after I heard Brahma's voice, the father of all gods!!

...Wha...What was Brahma's opinion on this matter!? Would he take my side!? Or, would he take Nemesil's side after all...!?

Brahma's voice echoed majestically through the almighty world of the innermost gods.

「Nemesil. Chronoa. Listen carefully. In fact, without the Order, Listarte's healing powers are the same as that of medicinal herbs.」

!! Lord Brahmaaaaa!????

I almost cried when I heard the harsh words of the Supreme God. Chronoa and Nemesil were both indignant.

「Medicinal herbs...you say? 」

「Even though, she's a goddess...? 」

Nemesil asked Brahma the following.

「Are you saying that her healing powers are not strong enough? 」

「Yes. They're excessively useless. 」

The Supreme God just said that my powers were "excessively useless"!!

After a moment of silence, Nemesil, the God of Reason, professed the following command.

「All right. In that case, I'll release the divinity order of restraint held upon the useless goddess Listarte...The healing powers shall be available for now on....」

—

When we came back from the almighty world of the innermost gods, the Great Goddess Isister put her hand on my shoulder and nodded silently. I wanted to ask her about many things. But, I finally managed to get my healing powers back. I was grateful. Therefore, I suppressed my feelings for now.

Chapter 66: A Mermaid's Sorrow

I thanked the Great Goddess Isister. When I tried to leave the “room that stops time”...

「Listarte. Take this with you. 」

A voice echoed inside my head.

「It's an historical data. But, it could be useful for you. 」

This voice was familiar to me. That's right. It was the voice of Chronoa, the Goddess of Time. After she professed those words, a piece of paper came flying overhead.

「Her Eminence Lady Chronoa...? 」

After I got the piece of paper, I looked above my head and asked what that was. I got no reply.

I looked closely at the paper...and I was shocked to see what was written in there.

The Demon King Artemaeus

Level – 99 (MAX)

HP – 1092174

MP – 354788

Attack – 817772

Defense – 806584

Agility – 789834

Magic – 665473

Potential – 999 (MAX)

「The...The status of the Demon King Artemaeus!! 」

Next to me, the Great Goddess Isister nodded when I shouted aloud.

「Her Ladyship Chronoa has prepared that for you. 」

「Bu...But, is it all right!? Can I really get access to the data about the Last Boss!?!」

「This data was registered when Artemaeus defeated the hero's party and received the blessing from the evil god. Therefore, there isn't any problem to give you the old data.」

I had a look at the data again.

No special skills nor resistances were written on the paper. Even so, it was an amazing status altogether. I was speechless to see a dreadful ability value that I've never seen before. The Great Goddess Isister was staring at me with a serious expression.

「Although the battle just started, I don't think any human hero has defeated an enemy with a status as great as this one. It seems that saving Exfolia will be more difficult than I ever imagined it would be.」

When she noticed my nervous look, the Great Goddess Isister changed her tone.

「You are in the middle of an imminent crisis, am I correct? After finishing what you have pending, please tell Ryuguuin Seiya to come to the God's realm again. In order to make your journey a little easier, I shall make another proposal to the innermost gods of the almighty world...」

—

I parted ways with the Great Goddess Isister. Afterwards, I made a rice ball and a simple side dish and put them inside a bento lunch box. Then, I headed to the hut in the "Heavenly Mountain of Seclusion".

I was about to drop the meal box when I opened the hut's door.

It was Bunogeos! He was right in front of my eyes!

In my head, I was probably aware that it was due to the art of change. Still, the atmosphere was quite intense and I felt a sense of intimidation just by looking at that devilish large body.

「Ah, sorry...but, is it you...Seiya...!? 」

「Yeah. 」

Even his voice resembled Bunogeos' voice! I wouldn't be able to tell them apart!

Then, I finally realized it.

That's right! Seiya was planning to use the art of change to transform into Bunogeos! He decided that a long time ago! That's why he waited three days to examine Bunogeos even though he could win that fight immediately! That explained the "oink" sound! He was practicing during that time! He didn't lose his mind!

After emitting a bright light, Bunogeos returned back to Seiya.

「It seems that you've already mastered the art of change! 」

「Yeah. I was able to learn this quicker than originally planned. 」

「What? Speaking of which, where is Lady Rusti? 」

「She's sitting over there. 」

A young-looking Rusti was sitting on a triangle chair in the corner of the room.

「La...Lady Rusti!? 」

「...Leave me alone. 」

She was feeling quite upset. I think I knew why she was behaving like that. She must've lost her confidence after watching Seiya's incredible learning speed. I left her be alone for the time being.

「Ah, that's right! Seiya! I can use my healing powers again! The Great Goddess Isister asked the innermost gods for permission to give my powers back!」

Seiya just shook his nose and only said 「Yeah 」 .

...Wha...What was that! Why such a bored face! I bet he was secretly happy, was I wrong?

I activated my Appraisal skill after a long time.

★Lista's Heart-Throbbing Love Appraisal★

◎What is the degree of affection between you and him? 『5 points 』

◎What do you represent for him? 『Medicinal Herb Woman 』

◎Word of Advice! 『Recognized as a "Walking Medicinal Herb"! It is better to have this herb than not having anything!』

...YES! I was no longer less than a weed! I became a medicinal herb woman! It was better than before! And, the affection points got higher by 4 points! Great...

When I slightly jumped in delight, I heard Rusti's voice from the corner of the room.

「Hey...What's wrong with you? 」

「No...Somehow, I...became sad all of a sudden... 」

I was far from feeling depressing emotions, but I had to hide my excitement. I heard Seiya's voice then.

「Hey, Lista. You said something about the innermost gods. What kind of gods are they?」

Seiya put his finger on his chin while I explained.

「They are the God of Creation, the God of Reason. And, the Goddess of Time... 」

He closed his eyes and started mumbling.

「Time...Saturday...Paradox...Past...Doll... 」

「Wha...What's wrong? 」

Soon after, Seiya opened his eyes and nodded as if he was convinced about something.

「It's nothing. It's just a soliloquy. Don't worry about it. 」

「Is...Is that so...? Ah, look at this! Her Eminence Lady Chronoa gave this to me! It's the data of the Demon King Artemaeus from one year ago!」

He took the paper sheet from my hands and looked carefully at the contents. He was silent for a brief moment, but he didn't change his expression.

「Both the attack and defense powers are beyond the powers of Geabrande's Demon King.」

...Oh...! This Demon King was stronger than Geabrande's Demon King was, and Seiya had to use the Destruction Operation Method the Final twice, namely the "Valhala Gate", in order to defeat it! Yet, Seiya lost his life to accomplish that victory...!

Although I knew the seriousness of our situation, I felt a greater sense of despair. Was there any technique capable of defeating such an overpowering enemy?

Rusti, who has been depressed until now, stood up and approached us. She looked at the paper sheet and she changed her complexion.

「That...That's ridiculous. This enemy is stronger than our gods are. Are you people going to be all right?」

「I...I don't know...! 」

In such a tense atmosphere, Seiya stroke further despair.

「You said that this was past data. If that's correct, then that means that the Demon King might have achieved a further power-up since then.」

「Bu...But, Seiya! The Demon King already reached level MAX, right? If this is true, then... 」

「I reached my level MAX as well. Besides, I'm trying to find a way to somehow overcome this. In other words, the enemy could be thinking about the same thing just like me.」

「Co...Come to think of it, the Great Goddess Isister told me that she didn't feel any sign of the Demon King Artemaeus in Exfolia! That could be...! 」

「Yes. It would be reasonable for us to think that he already has the power to break through all his limits.」

Our despair grew when we thought carefully about it and we all felt weak and hopeless.

After a long silence inside the hut, Seiya raised his voice to change the gloomy atmosphere.

「Anyways. Now we have to focus on surpassing the upcoming inspection by the Grand Lion. If I could, I would rather choose to go by myself. However, saving Exfolia is your punishment, Lista. Therefore, I must take you with me. So...」

Seiya looked at me with sharp eyes.

「You will change into a monster as well. 」

「Me...Me, you say!? I can't!! I didn't learn the art of change, you know!? 」

「Don't worry. She taught me the mysterious "art of object change" and I've mastered it. One can use it to change others according to the invoker's wishes.」

As soon as he professed those words, Seiya stretched his right hand on my direction.

「You will become a mermaid. 」

...Eh? Me...Mermaid? Did he meant the mythological mermaids? Oh my! It's been a long time since I've admired those mystic but beautiful creatures! Bu...But, mermaids had no legs...Would it be all right?

Soon, the light wrapping around my body gradually disappeared.

I was shocked when I saw my appearance through the full-length mirror that Rusti brought me.

...A head of a tuna fish.

...A lumpy body covered with mossy scales.

...A fishy smell overflowing from the whole body.

I transformed into a fish-man standing upright on two legs.

「No, this is not a mermaid!! It's a fish-man!! 」

「I saw a fish-shaped beast man in Exfolia. I remembered his visual and used it for you.」

「Why did you choose a fish-man in the first place!? 」

「According to my research, fish-men are less intelligent than other beast men are. They can only talk the short fish language “glu, glu”. Summing up, you won’t have the need to talk about unnecessary things. Besides, there’s a little possibility that you’ll annoy me with a useless talk. This monster transformation is perfect for you.」

「Don’t joke with me!! Bring my original appearance back!! 」

「Hey. This is not a joke. Take this seriously. 」

「No!! I don’t want to!! I am a goddess!! I refuse to look like this even if I have to die... 」

「...Lista. 」

Seiya exhaled a deep breath after he heard my fish-man tantrum.

「Then, show me what useful things you can do for my sake. 」

「Ugh...! 」

That serious tone was unusual given Seiya’s character. I felt utterly frustrated with this. Nonetheless, avoiding this predicament was impossible for me.

「I...I understand...I’ll endure it... 」

「Good. Let’s start the special training from now on. 」

Afterwards, Seiya began to lecture me how to behave like a fish-man. He said, 「No matter how much you perfect your fish-man’s figure. They’ll get suspicious if you behave strangely.」 . He spoke without stopping.

—

「Listen carefully. Don’t speak the human language in Exfolia without my permission. If you want to say something, just say “glu, glu”. 」 ...

「I decided on some signs for us. If you move your mouth two times, it would mean a yes. Three times will be a no. Also, let’s decide on a sign in case the enemy sees it. For that case, move your glands on the same number of times. 」 ...

「Wrong. You should walk more like a fish-man. 」 ...

「Don’t get close to aquatic beast men of the same type. In case one of them speaks with you, just remain silent.」 ...

「You still have long ways until you’ve become a full-fledged fish-man. Throw your human side away. Remember, you are a fish-man. 」 ...

I was taught by Seiya how to be a fish-man. I did my best to meet his expectations. Rusti grinned after seeing my fish-man looks walking around helplessly inside her hut. I even embraced my smelly odor for my practice. I could hear Rusti say that my “fishy smell stinks”.

Meanwhile, Seiya worked hard to improve his Earth Magic by handling the soil outside of the hut. When I asked him about that...

「I would like to be fully prepared just in case the Grand Lion finds out about us. It's just a precaution. If I could, I'd like to find the God of Earth and learn more about the properties of this magic. But, I don't have time for that now. I shall leave the full mastery of Earth Magic over to the next time.」

I went back to the hut to resume my fish-man walking training. I made sure to speak “glu, glu” while walking.

...One hour has passed already. Rusti watched me with a serious expression and spoke with a voice of admiration.

「That's amazing, Lista! You've become the perfect fish-man! The remnants of a goddess' character are fully gone!」

「Glu. Glu, glu. Glu. 」

「Lista!! What's wrong with you!? 」

「Ah...I forgot the human words... 」

Seiya came to the hut as well.

「Okay. It looks like you've become a real fish-man. Let's go now. 」

When Seiya approved my fish-man impersonation, I opened the portal to Exfolia. Seiya transformed into Bunogeos once again.

「The purpose of our next trip to Exfolia is to pass the Grand Lion's inspection with the body of Bunogeos and convince him that he killed the hero. But...」

Seiya's eyes transformed into Bunogeos' eyes, looked extremely sharp.

「...If I have a chance, I'll kill the Grand Lion and then I'll change myself to become just like him. That's what I have in mind.」

「Ye...Yes! Understood! 」

I asked Seiya before going to the portal.

「Seiya...What about "Perfectly Ready"? 」

「It's up to you. 」

...I guess so.

Chapter 67: The Hero's Miscalculation (1)

Per Seiya's request, I opened the portal in the hut and directed it onto an abandoned house near Bunogeos' mansion. Seiya, transformed into Bunogeos, opened the door of the portal. I thought he was going inside the door, but instead, he took a slender thing from his chest. That thing left Seiya's hand, crawled in the ground and went beyond the portal.

「Was that an Earth Snake? 」

「Yeah. It's an Automatic Naga specialized in reconnaissance. The Earth Snake's eyes are connected with my eyes.」

Seiya closed his eyes and kept silent for a while...

「Okay. I confirmed that there weren't any beast men in the vicinity. Let's go. 」

After securing our safety, we finally went through the portal.

—

After the portal disappeared, Seiya looked out through the window of a dimly lit room. He kept reminding me of the rules.

「Lista. Don't speak the human language from now on. Do you understand? 」

I nodded as I said 「glu. 」 .

Seiya has been extra cautious lately. Seiya opened the door immediately and began to roam freely on the town of Galvano. He walked quietly just like Bunogeos. I also did my best to walk like a fish-man and followed Seiya closely behind.

Eventually, two dog-faced beast men noticed Seiya and I, and came running on our direction.

「Lo...Lord Bunogeos! Where have you been all this time! 」

...It was going to be okay, right? I hoped they never find out about us...!

My heartbeat was going maddeningly fast. Yet, I didn't see any signs of nervousness on Seiya.

「Yeah. I killed the hero, but I was injured. I've been taking care of it up until now. 」

He spoke with a deep and extended voice. It sounded quite rough. When I looked closely at him, I noticed that Seiya-Bunogeos had bruises all over his body. Blood was overflowing from his left eye, the place where the Cursed Sphere was hiding. It was strange. It really looked like he fought with the hero for real. But, in reality, it was just Seiya.

The beast men continued to talk with Seiya without any suspicions.

「So, His Majesty the Grand Lion hasn't arrived in town yet? 」

「Yes. He's not here yet. 」

「I see. Then, I shall make the proper preparations for the arrival of His Majesty the Grand Lion. Hey, you two. Tell him to come to my mansion once you see him.」

The beast men lowered their heads and said, 「Understood. 」 in unison. Seiya started walking away. I pretended to be Bunogeos' attendee, and followed him quickly.

...Oh. They didn't find out about our true nature. The art of change was really an amazing skill!

—

We met some beast men along the way. Still, none of them was aware of our disguise. Before long, we arrived at Bunogeos' mansion. After examining the entire mansion, Seiya closed his eyes in the center of the main room. Perhaps, he was using one of his Earth Snakes to explore the area.

Soon, Seiya approached me and whispered on my ear.

「Okay. It's all right to speak only if we whisper. 」

I shrugged my shoulders.

The situation was great, we were alone and whispering to each other. Nevertheless, it was a conversation exchange between a pig-faced orc and a fish head monster. There wasn't anything romantic about this...

「It seems that we have time until the Grand Lion comes to town. I will place the Earth Snakes around the mansion. They will attack at any time...Lista. You should clean up this room to some extent. But, don't clean excessively. There should be signs of previous fighting.」

I rearranged the room while Seiya went outside. Shortly afterwards, Seiya brought a young man and a young woman held in chains. Seiya-Bunogeos tied the frightened man and woman to the edge of the room as if they were pets.

He...He even brought human slaves! It wasn't necessary to prepare this much...!

「Lista. These slaves are...No, wait a moment... 」

Seiya's movements stopped unexpectedly. He glanced at me and nodded in silence.

...It...It can't be...! He...He finally arrived...! The Grand Lion...!

It has been proven that the beast men didn't notice our true identities. But, for some reason, my fast heartbeat didn't slow down. My instinct as a goddess was ringing like a warning bell.

Soon, I heard a high sound. The vibration shook my earlobes. It seemed like a strong galloping horse. Beyond the broken window, I saw a large beast riding a carriage pushed by two dragons.

The goat-shaped beast man steered the cart. The grand enemy was sitting in a place with a proper back seat to rest his shoulders. The beast had a lion's head with a long golden mane that swung in the wind. The body looked thick and rough, and was covered by a black armor. I didn't see a sword, but he was well-equipped with black claws on his hands. They looked like sharp knives. It looked like he had a burnt human arm on one of his hands. He carried it to his mouth.

...Who...Whoa...he was chewing a human arm...! That's the Beast Emperor the Grand Lion...!

Even if he was far away, I could feel a full sense of intimidation. He was emitting a powerful black aura much stronger than any other enemy I've seen in Exfolia so far.

Seiya-Bunogeos, who watched the same scene next to me, became...

「Ugh...! 」

Suddenly, I heard a quivering voice.

「What...is that ability value...! 」

Apparently, Seiya was looking at the status of the Grand Lion. Even so, was Grand Lion's status so amazing that even Seiya got that surprised?

I also activated my clairvoyance ability. When I saw the Grand Lion's ability value...

Beast Emperor the Grand Lion

Level – 99 (MAX)

HP – 1200044

MP – 0

Attack – 856121

Defense – 819637

Agility – 807711

Magic – 58754

Potential – 999 (MAX)

Resistance – Fire, Water, Wind, Lightening, Ice, Earth, Light, Darkness, Poison, Paralysis, Curse, Instant Death, Sleep, Abnormal Condition

Special skills – Evil God Protection (Lv MAX)

Skills – Jet Black Nail

Personality – Villainous

The Attack power...was above 850,000...!? What on earth was this thing...!!

I shook Seiya-Bunogeos' shoulder with my trembling hands.

「This can't be true!! It's impossible!! Camouflage!! It's a fake, isn't it!? He's showing a fake status by using the camouflage skill, right!?!」

「Don't speak with a loud voice. What you saw was, without a doubt, the enemy's true status.」

「But!! Why are the attack and defense powers higher than the powers of the Demon King Artemaeus!?!」

「Calm down. As originally planned, we'll try to succeed in passing the Grand Lion's inspection. Just that and nothing else.」

Then, he turned at me with icy eyes.

「I have no time to explain all the details. Anyway, just keep silent no matter what happens from now on. Did you hear me? No matter what happens. We'll die if you don't stay silent.」

「I...I...I understand... 」

I knew that, but my mind was in a panicking state!! A subordinate that exceeded the ability value of the Demon King...Wasn't this an unusual occurrence!?

I couldn't stop shaking. I heard footsteps approaching from outside the door.

I wasn't able to control my terrified demeanor and, then, the door slowly opened...the Beast Emperor the Grand Lion revealed its majesty.

「...Your place is a bit tattered. Hey you, was it because the hero showed up at your house?」

He muttered after looking at the room. It was a low and impassioned voice that echoed through my internal organs.

After looking at Seiya-Bunogeos, the Grand Lion threw a glance at me. He stared at my eyes for a short moment, but his eyes turned back to Seiya-Bunogeos once again. It wasn't uncommon for Bunogeos, the ruler of this town, to have his own underling beast.

「Bunogeos. It looks like you're wounded. Are you okay? 」

「Yes. Some...Somehow, I beat that annoying he...hero...but, that bastard was tough... 」

「You defeated him huh. Well, you're not supposed to lose against a mere human, are you?」

On that moment, Seiya-Bunogeos touched the wall abruptly. He made a painful sound.

「Hey, hey. Are you all right? 」

「Ugh. Oink. Yeah, somehow. 」

「It seems that the fight was rough. I know that your injuries are not light, but I need to continue with the inspection. Well, don't worry. I'll do it quickly.」

...I was impressed by Seiya's acting ability.

Great! It will be harder to notice some differences if he acted as if he was seriously injured! If the enemy noticed some behavioral irregularity, it could still be fooled because he was hurt!

「So, the purpose of this inspection is... 」

The Grand Lion decided to visit Galvano two days ago. It was during that time that Seiya was killing the beast men with the Burst Air. In other words, it was decided that, based on their conversation, that the Grand Lion would come here to help Bunogeos. The plan was to defeat the hero together. However, Bunogeos apparently defeated the hero. So, what was the purpose of this inspection...?

My spine froze when I heard the Grand Lion's following words.

「I'll say this clearly. The focus of this inspection is you, Bunogeos. I'm here to confirm that you are yourself.」

...Wha...Wha...What did he just say...!?

「The evil god with mottled hair told me this, "there is a possibility that the hero defeated him and transformed into him".」

The...The "evil god with mottled hair" again!! And...this was bad!! This was tremendously bad!! Our actions were foreseen by the enemy!! We're going to die...!!

Chapter 67: The Hero's Miscalculation (2)

The enemy had foreseen our plans!! Everything will be ruined for sure!!

The Grand Lion continued to speak about his inspection...

「Sorry about this, but I'll just examine you with two or three questions. If I determine that you're the real Bunogeos, I'll wrap everything up.」

The Grand Lion approached Seiya slowly and looked fixedly at him.

They stood very close to one another that even their breaths collided...They were both silent. Ten seconds of silence felt extremely long to me.

「The smell, aura, ability value...There is no mistake that you are Bunogeos. 」

「Of...Of course, I am. 」

The Grand Lion asked a question after Seiya-Bunogeos laughed amiably.

「What happened to the corpse of the hero you've defeated? 」

「I wanted to capture him alive. But, in the end, his body shattered into small pieces. 」

「He was formidable enemy, huh. It can't be helped, then. But...Are you really telling me the truth? You didn't eat him, did you?」

「No...No way. O...Oink... 」

「Okay. Next question. There was a certain conversation we've had on the crystal ball not too long ago...Do you remember that? I want to hear the answer to my question.」

「Eh, what? An answer, you say? 」

「I asked you before. The "exact number", you know. You were supposed to answer me with the exact number, isn't that right?」

The Grand Lion stared fiercely at Seiya with haunting eyes! Still, I felt slightly relieved! The number that the Grand Lion was asking for...Was the "total number of beast men killed by the hero"! I heard it when we were below Bunogeos' mansion! We listened to his conversation for research purposes back then! So, that harsh mole life was useful after all! It was just for the sake of this moment! He has been thinking about becoming Bunogeos even before he defeated him...Just as expected of Seiya! He never misses anything!

「Hey. What's wrong? You said that you'll look into that later, didn't you? 」

「Ye...Yeah... 」

「Tell me, Bunogeos. 」

The Grand Lion was looking at him with suspicious eyes. I became upset and impatient with the delay of his answer.

What...What's wrong with you, Seiya!? Did you forget about the number because of this stressful situation!? You've exterminated 300 beast men!! The enemy's suspicion will subside if you said that exact number!!

「Why can't you tell me? Hey! 」

「A...About that...Well... 」

Sweat dropped from Seiya-Bunogeos' face! Under such circumstances, a violent aura started to overflow from the Grand Lion's body!

「Just tell me...you bastard...if you can't...I'll kill you...! 」

Eh, eh, eh!? Wh...Why!? Why didn't he answer him!?

My breathing rate became disturbed under the pressure of this panicking situation! However...

「...Okay. I dislike that forgetting habit of yours. 」

Just when he was about to jump with a murderous intent, the Grand Lion loosened his fierce face and became calmer again.

Eh...! Wha...What happened just now...?

「It seems it's you, Bunogeos. 」

「I...I apologize... 」

I...I got it!! He knew Bunogeos' true character!! Therefore, he didn't answer that question and pretended not to know the exact number of kills!! Pe...Perfect!! This was too perfect!!

「Well...It seems there is no mistake that you're the real you... 」

「Su...Surely. I've been myself since the beginning. 」

「Yeah. But, that was what the mottled hair implied to me. The crystal ball showed some noisy disturbance a couple of days ago. That could've been the hero's doing.」

A couple of days ago...That was when Seiya became cautious once again! In other words, Seiya expected that the enemy would see him and, by using the camouflage skill, he disturbed the enemy's crystal ball with noise? Even...Even so...!

「The noise hasn't cleared away completely. Based on the mottled hair's words, the hero is alive and continues to interfere with our lives...It seems there's a possibility he's deceiving us. So, there's a valid reason why the evil god with mottled hair said that "the hero tracked and examined the enemy and successfully disguised as Bunogeos".」

Then, the Grand Lion slammed his fist on the table. The table was destroyed without a trace in an instant due to his fearsome strength.

「That damned mottled hair! Making things harder for me! I'm mad now! I shall finish this immediately! There's an easier way to know the truth! Yes! A simple way to distinguish between humans and demons!」

The Grand Lion pointed to the slave women that trembled in the corner of the room.

「Bunogeos. This is the last ordeal of this inspection. That woman...kill her! 」

The woman started to cry when she heard those terrifying words. Seiya-Bunogeos also made a shaky voice upon hearing that command.

「Is...Is it all right? Murder is forbidden on this town. 」

「Today's an exception. Kill her. 」

I was sweating excessively from my body.

No...No...No way!!There was no way that he'll kill a human being!! Seiya-Bunogeos brought those slaves for the sake of his disguise!! But, things escalated this quickly!! Those slaves looked absolutely frightened as they shook their heads continuously!!

「You can kill her. You'll be able to do it without any problems because you're not the hero.」

The Grand Lion put his hand on Seiya-Bunogeos' shoulder. And then...

「Oh...Oh well. I...I have no choice then... 」

Seiya-Bunogeos pulled the axe from his back.

...That axe was not really an axe! It was the Platinum Sword affected by the art of change! There's no way to avoid this now! He'll probably make it look as if he were about to kill that slave, and then, attack the Grand Lion by surprise! And, afterwards, try to find a way to escape from this place somehow...

However! My speculation was totally different from reality! Seiya-Bunogeos came close to the slave woman, swung his axe and slammed it on the woman without saying a word! The attack was so strong that the floor broke alongside with the woman! It created a large crater on the ground!

I was completely petrified by the unbelievable scene that unfolded right in front of my eyes.

...Im...Impossible...!! Seiya...killed a slave...a human being...!?

Seiya-Bunogeos spoke tranquilly.

「I really wanted to eat that human. Oh my! Ah, sorry, don't take my words seriously! I was, oink, only joking!」

「Okay. You're finally in tune with yourself, Bunogeos. 」

The two of them spoke happily with each other. But, I couldn't stop shaking.

The...There's no way that Seiya became a murderer!! He probably didn't kill that human!! It was probably a facade!! He probably prepared something for this ordeal in advance!! But...But...!!

The moment he attacked the slave woman, her flesh spilled on my eyes. I saw that woman's limbs. They were destroyed in pieces and were on the verge of being swallowed by the moving sand of the crater...

Regardless of my duty, I slowly approached Seiya from behind.

「Se...Seiya... 」

As soon as I called his name, Seiya-Bunogeos looked back and held my arms tight. His eyes were widely open.

Seiya whispered to me with a scary face, 「Shup up! Be quiet! 」 .

The Grand Lion looked at me with a suspicious expression.

「Hey. Who the hell is that fish? 」

「Ah...yeah. He's an assistance of mine to look after my personal belongings. 」

「Did he say something to you just now? 」

The Grand Lion tried to approach me, but on the way, he frowned and shook his head.

「Gosh. What a horrible fishy smell. 」

I scratched my head and responded with fish-man words.

「Glu...glu, glu... 」

「What a bother. I don't know why we have tribes of beast fish-men. I never understand what they say.」

The Grand Lion turned his gaze to Seiya-Bunogeos.

「Sorry to keep you like this when you're badly injured. This is the end of my inspection. I'm going back to Tarmine.」

...After talking to Seiya-Bunogeos about two or three questions of his inspection, the Grand Lion returned back to his carriage. Seiya-Bunogeos bowed his head to give a respectful farewell. I also bowed to replicate his gesture.

Eventually, the door closed with a cracking sound. When I raised my head, the Beast Emperor the Grand Lion was no longer in the room.

—

I tried to speak with Seiya. But, he shook his head and closed his eyes. I became quiet when I noticed that it was not the right moment to talk yet. Seiya finally nodded. He probably used his Automatic Naga to see if the Grand Lion really left this place.

「Hey, listen, Seiya!! You...You really...killed that slave...? 」

I finally uttered the courage to ask him that question. On this moment, Seiya-Bunogeos grabbed my chest violently.

「Ugh!? 」

At the same, a shining light emitted from our bodies. Seiya and mine's appearance changed and we returned to our original bodies. And, right now...the hero was staring at me with crazily sharp eyes just like a fearsome hawk.

「I told you to keep your mouth shut no matter what happened. 」

「But...But...! 」

「The Grand Lion didn't suspect you because you were lucky. We could've suffered irreversible consequences if he decided to inspect you.」

And then, Seiya beat me wildly. I fell on the floor with my buttocks.

「Bu...But! Se...Seiya, you...and that slave...! 」

Seiya approached the slave man, who trembled in the corner of the room, and held his hand.

「Eh...! 」

After the light disappeared, the man turned into a doll made of soil.

「The slaves were a combination of Earth Magic and the art of change. I thought that the Grand Lion would suspect me. There was a possibility that he'll ask me to kill human slaves. Therefore, I placed two dolls made of soil in the room as a precaution.」

「I...I never thought you could do things like that as well...! 」

「In addition to simple movements, I made those fake people speak a few words. Furthermore, I made sure to use the camouflage skill in order to reflect the general human status. Besides that, I activated the camouflage skill on both of us as well.」

「You thought about everything...! 」

「Of course. Yet, no matter how well prepared I am, you always have the nerve to ruin everything.」

「I...I'm sorry... 」

After I apologized, Seiya continued to speak.

「I expected that an enemy, whose ability value could be closer in power to that of the Demon King, existed. It was just an assumption. But, to be honest, I never expected that an enemy with a status that exceeded the Demon King's would appear in the early stage of saving this world. We have to make major changes to our plans for the future...」

It was unusual for Seiya to say that he only had an "assumption", and that he was mistaken in the end. His voice was also rough and serious.

But, Seiya's frustration was undeniably accurate. In addition to the appearance of an enemy with an unexpected ability value, I was about to jeopardize everything that Seiya prepared so carefully. The Grand Lion could have killed us both if he discovered who I really was...

I felt an unbearable heavy atmosphere that surrounded our presence.

Chapter 68: The Goddess' Declaration

In any case, we escaped the predicament. I made the portal to the God's realm appear straightaway because I knew that the Great Goddess Isister wanted to meet with Seiya as soon as we got back. However, Seiya silently used his Earth Magic with the power of the art of change to create a Bunogeos doll. He placed the doll on a bed inside the room and covered it with a blanket. Apparently, he used that disguise to buy us time while we went to the God's realm.

「Listen. Before we go, don't you think it's better to tell everyone of the Light of Hope that you defeated Bunogeos?」

Yet, Seiya ignored me and went straight to the portal.

「Wait...Wait a moment, Seiya!! Did you hear what I just said!? 」

「...The Grand Lion will exterminate everyone if he finds out about the Light of Hope. It's safer if they don't know about it for now. So, it's better if they continue to live underground.」

He spit out those words without even looking at my face.

We returned to the God's realm with the worst possible atmosphere.

—

The portal was connected with the corridor in front of the Great Goddess Isister's room. Seiya opened the door widely without even knocking.

「Hey, old hag. Was that data really given to us by the gods of the innermost world?」

He didn't even greet the Great Goddess. It was so abrupt and rude. Instead, he just asked her a question about only his interests...

「Yes. That was definitely the data given by Her Ladyship Chronoa, the Goddess of Time.」

The Great Goddess Isister confirmed that fact for Seiya. After that, she nodded while listening to what Seiya had to say. Both the explanations and complains. When she realized that the ability value of the Grand Lion surpassed the status of the Demon King Artemaeus, the Great Goddess Isister's face became afflicted.

「If that's correct, then... you should avoid a direct battle against the Grand Lion. His attack power exceeds the 850,000 points...That ability value is similar to the strength of Adenela, the Goddess of War once her divine power is completely unleashed after receiving the Order. I'll say it clearly. It is impossible for humans to defeat the Grand Lion. 」

I was stunned and speechless. I became frightened by the fact that the highest-ranking deity in the God's realm, Isister, claimed that it was "impossible" to defeat that enemy.

「Then...Then, what should we do...!? 」

「There is a way. The outstanding strength of the Grand Lion must've come from the immense protection of the evil god. If you overthrow the source of the Grand Lion's power, then his ability value will weaken.」

Then, the Great Goddess Isister turned her eyes at Seiya.

「Originally, I intended to tell you this for the ultimate battle...But, I can't delay it any longer. Ryuguuin Seiya. From this moment, I'll tell you about the "Secret of the Evil Six-Hexagram". I already obtained the permission from the innermost gods.」

I was so perplexed that I shouted aloud.

「The Secret of the Evil Six-Hexagram...!! 」

On that instant, both Seiya and the Great Goddess Isister looked fixedly at my face.

「Oh my. Listarte. Did you know about this? 」

「No!! I don't know anything about it!! What's that!? 」

...An awkward silence dominated the surrounded area.

A few seconds later, Seiya finally spoke but with a serious expression.

「Lista. You're a nuisance. Get out from here within five seconds. 」

「O...Okay...I understand. 」

I got out immediately. After closing the door, I silently pressed my teeth.

...What's wrong with him!! C'mon!! It wasn't my fault for not knowing anything about it!!

—

「...The Secret of the Evil Six-Hexagram. I don't know much about the details, but I heard that it's the secret on how the gods used to defeat the mighty enemies of the evil god class.」

I was in the room of the senior goddess Aria. After listening to the story, I exhaled a big and depressive sigh. Aria looked at me anxiously.

「Are you okay? Lista? 」

「Well...It's been so hard lately... 」

「I know it's been tough. Many things have happened to you. But, drink this and cheer up. 」

I tried to drink the warm tea with gentleness. However, I couldn't contain the frustration swelling inside my heart and I started to complain without stopping.

「I have been doing my best, you know!? Even though I'm a goddess, I ate Death Earthworms!! I even became a fish-man and had to speak "gluglu"!! And yet, trampling was the only treatment I've received so far!!」

「But...But, your life could've been in danger if the Grand Lion found out about your identity, am I right? That's why Seiya is more angry than usual... 」

「Is that really so!? I...I don't understand any of this anymore!! Was I really that important to him in our previous lives!?」

Contrary to my frustration, Aria took a sip from her cup of tea with tranquility. Then, she looked at me with a somber expression.

「Listen, Lista. A reborn human won't be able to remember the past. The same happens to a human that was reincarnated as a deity. Do you know the reason why?」

「Eh...That is... 」

When I couldn't give a proper answer, Aria responded with a firm tone.

「"To forget everything and live the next life". Forgetting is the best way to keep living earnestly without getting too lost within the memories of the past.」

「I...I see. 」

...I thought that Aria's statement was correct. Yet, my heart said, "no matter what happened, Seiya was still someone very special to me"...I couldn't deny those feelings completely.

—

After leaving Aria's room, I headed in direction of the Great Goddess Isister's room. Of course, I just went in order to check on Seiya.

「Excuse me... 」

After I said that and opened the door...Seiya was no longer inside the room.

「Wha...What!? Don't tell me that Seiya already learnt about everything!? 」

The Great Goddess Isister smiled.

「He is originally a fast-learner child. It wasn't hard for him to remember everything about the secret. Even so, he learnt about the difficulty of the Evil Six-Hexagram.」

「So, where is Seiya? 」

「He is a very prudent child. He felt uneasy about only learning the secret. He said, “I want to acquire new skills”, and went to meet with Valkyrie on the rooftop.」

I had a very bad feeling about it for some reason. I gave my thanks to the Great Goddess Isister and rushed immediately to the rooftop.

—

When I opened the door of the top floor of the temple, I noticed a crescent moon and a full moon on the sky...The two moons shined brightly close to each other as if they embraced warmly. And...

Under the shining light of the moonlights from the God's realm, stood Seiya and Valkyrie! They were hugging each other passionately!

「Heyyyy!? Why the hell are you both doing that again!? 」

My ominous premonition was spot on! I screamed when I saw that déjà vu-scenario! But, they didn't notice my presence because they were fully absorbed on their own world of a fervently enamored hug!

「Seiya. I knew that you'd come back here one more time. 」

「Valkyrie. Geabrande was saved thanks to your destruction technique. 」

Moreover, their faces were so close that their breaths touched one another!

...Wh...Why!? Previously, Seiya and Valkyrie embraced each other naked for the sake of transferring the destruction technique's aura!! So, I thought that they didn't have a deep and romantic relationship at all!!

「By the way, I forgot about the skills I've learnt from the other gods. But, somehow, I remembered one of your skills, the Shattered Break. Why did that happen?」

「Remembering the Destruction Operation Method is a sign of your commitment to me. You're not supposed to completely forget about it. You'll remember all of my skills in due time.」

「I see...Also, Valkyrie. I'm looking for a way to go beyond the limits of my status. When I looked at your status before, I saw a special skill called “Status Limit Breakthrough”. Therefore, I wanted to ask you if you know something that could help me?」

「It's a shame, but I was already born with that skill because I'm a Goddess of Destruction. I don't know how to teach others about it.」

「Is that so... 」

After Valkyrie saw how dim-looking Seiya became after hearing her answer, she spoke hesitantly about a possible method of a limit breakthrough.

「There is a way to go beyond the limits of your status within the depths of the God's realm. Isister mustn't know about this. I can't even bring myself to say it clearly from my mouth.」

She...She wasn't able to tell clearly about the existence of that option!? In other words, didn't that means that it was a pretty dangerous way!?

「Listen carefully, Seiya. It's in the Heavenly Green Forest. You'll find a hint in there. 」

...I was almost out of breath for standing quietly at the door. I rushed immediately on their direction to interrupt their conversation. I shouted aloud to show them my presence.

「Se...Seiya!! The Great Goddess Isister taught you the secret, didn't she? That means you have a countermeasure to go up against the Grand Lion!! Why do you need to do such dangerous training now!?!」

Seiya looked at me with hateful eyes.

「It's too late now for me to say "I should've done this before". I can't be on my best shape if I remain like this. Therefore, practice is the only way to get serious about the next fight.」

Valkyrie folded her arms and nodded in response.

「Exactly. I know that very well. 」

And then, she touched Seiya's cheek with her thin finger.

「Things would be different if I were your goddess. 」

「Yeah. You're right. It would be easier to save Exfolia with Valkyrie instead. 」

「Wha...Wha...Wha...What...!? 」

I was trembling furiously from the ongoing humiliation. On that moment, Valkyrie approached Seiya and bounced her body next to his.

「Seiya. Don't use the Celestial Prison-Gate again. I will miss you greatly if you're gone...」

「You're right. I'll try to avoid it as much as possible. 」

The two of them had their faces extremely close to each other. It was as if they were about to kiss...

「Whoaaaa!! Stop it!! 」

I couldn't bear to witness that anymore. I stood in between those two and pulled them apart with my force.

「Wha...What's wrong with you!! Listarte!! 」

At the same time, tears fell from my face.

「Ahhhh!! If this was supposed to happen, then I wished he remained shattered into pieces after the battle against Geabrande's Demon King!!」

「Do...Don't you dare say those outrageous words! You're the goddess in charge! 」

「Ugh! Because...Because...ugh! *sobs* 」

「Listarte... 」

For a brief moment, Valkyrie looked at me with a serious expression...However, soon after...

「*laughs aloud* that's quite a dirty way of crying!! Even though you're a goddess!! 」

I got extremely angry when I heard her laugh.

「What did you say!!!!!! 」

I was crying and shouting extremely high. I even struck Valkyrie, but as the Goddess of Destruction, meaning that she was the strongest deity in the God's realm, she thought it wasn't necessary to avoid my pathetic punch. She showed a disgusted expression then.

「Seriously. C'mon, Listarte. Pull yourself together. You're not human anymore... 」

—

I followed Seiya to the Heavenly Green Forest as I continued to cry endlessly.

There was a considerable distance to the forest from the rooftop of the temple.

The sadness turned into pain after I started to walk the long distance. And then...

...Ah. What did I do up there? I made a fool of myself...

My sadness and pain transformed into frustration and anger over time.

That's right...! Valkyrie was absolutely correct! Aria also said the same thing about Seiya and me! I was no longer Princess Tiana, who was in love with Seiya! I am a goddess now and Seiya is a human! From now on, we shall only engage in a strict professional relationship...!

The entrance of the Heavenly Green Forest was illuminated by the moonlights.

I wiped my tears on the sleeves of my dress and I shouted towards the hero's back.

「Ryuguuin Seiya!! 」

The hero looked back at me with a bored expression.

「What? 」

「I am a goddess!! And you are the hero I've summoned here!! There isn't more nor less than that!!」

「What's up with you. That's obvious. 」

「You're right!! But, I had to say this in order to remember what I am once again!! 」

I declared the following with a pressing heart.

「Save Exfolia, Ryuguuin Seiya!! You're the talented one in a hundred million people!! Please, lend me your power!!」

After staring at me as if he was looking at an idiot, Seiya snorted a small sigh, shook his nose and began to walk again.

I followed him like always. But, I felt better with myself and the mood was clearer than before.

—

「...By the way, Mithis. Do you know a way to break the limit of my ability value? 」

「Yes. There is certainly a way. 」

The bewitching Mithis, the Goddess of Bow, promptly answered Seiya's question.

「Then, tell me. 」

「*grins* I can tell you, but before that, I must ask you about the only thing that I'm worried about.」

After saying that, Mithis took a deep breath.

「...Why am I suddenly tied up to this large tree? 」

As soon as we found Mithis, Seiya approached her from behind and seized her with his sword. (EN: This is not a pun, he didn't use his "sword", he used his real sword) After that, he wrapped her around a large tree by using a rope.

「You are a pervert who suddenly becomes naked and attacks. So, I took care of that first.」

「Is that so? 」

There were no objections. Mithis seemed to be convinced. She spoke with a serious voice while being tied up to the tree.

「In the depths of this forest...there is an abyss where the power of the Great Goddess Isister can't reach...Seiya, you'll probably find a way of breaking through the limit of your power in there.」

「Oh. The depths of this forest, you say. 」

After listening to that story, Seiya turned around and walked away, leaving Mithis behind. I was surprised that he didn't untie her up.

「Eh...Aren't you going to take the rope off? Even though you learned how to do it before...?」

When I looked back at Mithis, I saw that her face was boiling red and she trembled incessantly.

「AH!! To leave me tied up like this then!! I'm getting extremely thrilled by this outcome!! 」

...Yeah. It was better to leave her like that. It's not as if she'll die anyways.

We left Mithis behind our backs, and we proceeded to enter the deepest part of the Heavenly Green Forest.

—

As I walked silently, I noticed that the trees around me turned into a weird shape. The dense woods blocked the moonlights and made the visibility gradually worse. It felt as if I walked through the forest of the devil instead of the divine forest of the God's realm.

I became scared and tried to grab Seiya's arm. But, I kept telling myself over and over again that "I was a goddess! Seiya was a human!". Therefore, I just walked silently with my fists tight.

Seiya stopped walking unexpectedly.

「Hmm. That is... 」

After passing through the creepy trees, we saw an old well in the middle of the grassland.

「Why is there a well in a place like this...wait a second!! Don't tell me that this was "that thing" that I've heard before!!」

...It happened when I reincarnated as a goddess. Aria told me the following words when I was young and mischievous.

『Lista. You'll be in the well of no return if you don't listen to what I say. 』

Then, I became scared and started to cry.

『If you don't want that to happen to you, then you should listen to what I have to say from now on.』

And, Aria gently stroked my head.

...The "well of no return"...! I thought it was a horror story that Aria created in order to discipline me...So, it really existed...!

I touched Seiya's shoulder.

「Se...Seiya! This isn't a good place! We have to leave! Aria told me before that my head would go crazy if I approached this well!」

「If that's true, then you don't have a reason to be worried. 」

「Eh...? Wa...Wait...What does that mean, you bastard!! 」

Seiya went to the well without hesitating. He didn't have any sense of cautiousness when it came to practice.

「I would like to save Exfolia. But, in order to do that, I have to make some reckless decisions if I really want to break through my limits.」

「That might be true, but not with this!! 」

The well had a rope ladder. When Seiya touched it to confirm his safety, he started to descend the ladder. I was apprehensive. Nevertheless, I followed Seiya.

After we went down the ladder, we arrived in a dark, opened-space.

「Is this the inside of this well? It's wider than I thought it would be... 」

I could see a cave that spread ahead of us. It looked like a modern tunnel made of concrete.

「Wa...Wait for me, Seiya... 」

Seiya walked further inside the tunnel. I chased immediately after him.

「Lay your body to the ground!! 」

Suddenly, I heard a loud sound! Something that jumped out of the tunnel had hit me!

yells

I fell to the ground because of the shock!

「Wha...Wha...What happened!? 」

When I looked at my back, I noticed that someone with dirty camouflage clothes clashed into my body! I felt two soft objects on my back...Was that a woman...? But...But, living inside a well like this...?

weird screams

A woman with a messy hair screamed madly behind my back. She shook herself away from me and rolled down on ground by herself. Somehow, she reminded me of Adenela.

「The magic blast of the enemy has exploded! In order to avoid damage, it has to expand to the left and to the right!」

She looked ahead while screaming crazily. But, there wasn't anything beyond the line of sight.

「The Armagezedah is still going on! 」

「Armage...What on earth is this person talking about!? 」

The moment I spoke, the weird woman in camouflage clothes opened her eyes and jumped at me!

「Ehhhh!? 」

「Don't you know the Armagezedah!? Are you a new goddess!? 」

「I...I don't know anything about it!! Sorry!! I apologize for being a new goddess!! 」

Then, the woman with camouflage clothes slammed her fist on the ground.

「In the Armagezedah First. Valkyrie, the Goddess of Destruction, was with Isister when the squad of violence led by the god Merseys, cornered them to the edge!! Merseys defeated Valkyrie's destruction technique!! And, on that moment, stood Adenela, the Goddess of War, with the continuous gunshot sword...Oh gosh!」

She unleashed her anger for a brief moment. Soon after, she let it loose suddenly.

「However! I shall say it again "However"! If we bring the "State Berserk Phase 3rd", which has been improved through repeated takes, no enemy will oppose us, even Adenela, the Goddess of War!」

Somehow, I opened my mouth inadvertently after witnessing the mad scenario that this creepy woman created in front of us. She looked crazily at us with a grin and started to laugh insanely high.

「What...What the heck...are you!? 」

「Ah...I didn't introduce myself. How rude of me... 」

And then, the woman turned to me with frenzy and far-distant eyes.

「I am the Goddess of War, Zeth. 」

Chapter 69: Another Goddess of War

The goddess wearing camouflage clothes scratched her messy hair. Her hair became messier than before.

...The...The Goddess of War, Zeth...! It seemed that this goddess knew how to break through the limit of Seiya's status... Ah...What? She disappeared?

Suddenly, I noticed that Zeth was moving like an animal on the ground.

「*shouts crazily* For the Armageddah Second! Exercises are essential...!!!!」

Who...Whoa...! She was the same as Adenela...No, actually, I felt that this goddess was more abnormal! We have to be careful around her!

However, Seiya spoke normally while looking down on Zeth, who crawled in hysteria.

「Hey. She is an "insane person". 」

「How can you say it so bluntly!? 」

Even if it were true, how could he say it out loud on their first meeting!? There was something abnormal about him too!!

「My level is MAX and I can't go further up. Do you know a way to overcome the limits of my ability value?」

「...I know a way. 」

Zeth stood up quickly and placed her face next to Seiya's eyes.

「If you want to go beyond the limits of a human, then you must stop being a human yourself! Your physical power, except your magic, will double up if you become the non-human "Berserker"!」

Do...Double his status!? Was there a dream-like way to achieve double status, was this even possible!? If...If this was true, then there's no way that it will be easy to accomplish!!

However, Zeth smiled at Seiya.

「I'll teach you because I have free time! 」

「Really!? You're kidding!! Is that simple!? 」

「I've been trapped in a well for too long now. I'm getting bored. You can go out and return freely from this place. But, I won't be able to do that because of Isister's powerful barrier.」

「I have a question before we start. Who has mastered it before? 」

「Hmm. Well...There was only one person who did it so far. 」

「Is that skill dangerous to learn? 」

「Hmm. Well...At least you're not going to die. 」

This...This was suspicious...!! Actually, it was too good to be true!! Doubling his status would be impossibly great...!!

I called Seiya and whispered on his ear.

「Li...Listen. It seems that this practice won't have any guarantee of your safety, am I right? Isn't it better to stop it now and go back?」

「According to Isister, the Six-Hexagram can only be used once for a certain target. If that ends up a failure, then I'll need to have a second option in order to defeat the Grand Lion.」

「But! You don't know anything about the risks of this practice! You might not even be able to master it on time!」

「Valkyrie recommended this to me. She perfectly knew what I was getting into. In other words, I decided that it was safe to learn. It's worth a try.」

He mentioned Valkyrie once again... huh!? The overly cautious Seiya was really...trusting her completely...

Seiya told Zeth clearly.

「Tell me how to accomplish the power that could defeat Adenela, the "State Berserk Phase 3rd".」

Zeth shook her nose after hearing Adenela's name. There was no doubt that there was a feud between the two by the flow Zeth's the story so far.

「Phase 3rd can quadruple up one's ability value. That's impossible for human beings to accomplish. It's even impossible to learn the Phase 2nd where it would triple up the ability value. Therefore, I will teach you how to master the first stage of State Berserk.」

Zeth ventured into the dark tunnel and beckoned Seiya to follow her.

Seiya entered the tunnel to chase after Zeth. But, before going further inside, he looked back at me only once.

「Lista. Don't tell anyone that I'm training here. 」

...I went back to the temple as I passed through the forest at night.

State Berserk...Was it really that necessary to learn such a dangerous skill? I wondered if it wouldn't be possible to defeat the enemies with just the Six-Hexagram that the Great Goddess Isister taught him.

Still, it was what Seiya decided to do. Besides, his training probably had already begun by now. So, there wasn't anything I could do to avoid it anymore.

At that time. Unexpectedly...

『This way...』

I heard someone calling me in the forest during the darkness of the night.

『This...This way...』

screams

I got scared, closed my ears and ran away.

After returning to the temple, I started to think carefully about the voice I heard in the forest. Perhaps, it was Mithis' voice. Seiya tied her up to a tree with a rope.

...I'll have to break her rope tomorrow.

—

The next day.

—

I made a lunch pack and headed to the well of no return.

As I descended through the rope ladder, I saw that Zeth was walking in front of the tunnel.

「Ex...Excuse me...Where is Seiya? 」

「Ah, are you asking where Ryuguuin is? He is inside the "remodeling experiment chamber"...He is working hard in order to sustain his "mental concentration".」

「Didn't you say something outrageous just now!? 」

「I didn't say anything at all. 」

Zeth spread her arms wide when I tried to go inside the tunnel.

「You'll be a hindrance to his training if you step inside. 」

I had no choice but to give the lunch pack to Zeth.

—

Two days later.

—

I made another lunch pack for Seiya. I decided to pass in front of the cafe when I headed back to the forest. I heard Aria's voice. There was also Adenela and Celseus in the cafe.

「Hey, Lista. What kind of god is Seiya training with this time? 」

「Eh! Well...about that...you know...it's a great god indeed...it's teaching Seiya about a powerful skill! 」

Then, Adenela's eyes shined terrifyingly.

「Wh...Why...are...your words...a bit...too vague? Whe...Where is...Seiya now? 」

「Tha...That's right! Sorry to bother you! Do you have a private room? 」

Celseus looked at me with a stunned face.

「What's that? If you're talking about a toilet, I don't have one in my cafe. 」

「Yeah, that's right, a toilet! I'm busy now! I'll see you around! 」

I was sweating so much because of my nervousness. I had to run away from there immediately.

...Ah, that was dangerous! From now on, I'll do my best to avoid taking the path in front of the cafe!

—

...I went to the well of no return. But, I didn't see Seiya on this day too. Zeth was in front of the tunnel with a bamboo spear.

「Come on, it's a revolution! The dawn is near!!!! 」

I became anxious when I saw Zeth acting paranoid again. But, I noticed on the corner of the tunnel that the lunch pack I've brought yesterday was empty.

It seemed that Seiya ate the meal. I became a little relieved.

—

Then, the following day.

I came back, but I didn't see Seiya again. I waited for a while in front of the tunnel. Nonetheless, it looked as if he wasn't likely to come out soon, so I decided to return reluctantly.

However, after leaving the well of no return, I realized that I brought the chopsticks with me. Therefore, I returned back to put the chopsticks on the lunch pack.

I went inside the well in a hurry...And, I saw something unbelievable.

「Yummy! Yummy! This food ration is quite good! 」

Zeth was eating the lunch pack that I brought for Seiya!

「Hey, wait right there!! What on earth are you doing!? 」

「Oops!! I know this is rude!! But, Ryuguuin is training! I didn't want the food to get rotten, so I was flattering myself with it!」

「Wa...Wait a second!! Don't tell me that you've been eating his lunch packs all this time!? Seiya has not come out of that tunnel for three whole days!?」

I became angry, so I ran into the tunnel.

At the end of the dark tunnel, there was a glass-covered door. It had a plate that said the following words "remodeling experiment chamber".

When I approached that door...

roaring sound

「What!? 」

That was a very huge scream! It sounded as if a fierce animal was standing behind that door!

On the other side of the glass-covered door stood a demon with fangs and a vivid red hair. No...It wasn't a demon. Based on the clothes he was wearing, he was definitely...

「Seiya!? 」

「...Oh my, oh my. It's about time. He worked hard to transform in such a fine Berserker.」

I heard Zeth's voice from behind my back. I turned around and I glared hatefully at Zeth.

「Wha...What the hell is this!! What did you do to Seiya!? 」

「Well, this is exactly what he wanted. A crazy warrior. It's time to take a look at Ryuguuin's ability value...」

Ryuguuin Seiya

Profession – Magic Warrior (Earth Attribute) / State – Crazy Warrior

Level – 99 (MAX)

HP – 643920

MP – 88155

Attack – 586824

Defense – 575288

Agility – 537750

Magic – 58751

Potential – 999 (MAX) ...

「See! His status has doubled, am I not right? 」

「But...But, even so!! Is Seiya even conscious!? 」

「Naturally. Well, but I guess he isn't neither conscious nor rational. Right now, Ryuguuin is my own obedient puppet.」

「Wha...What the hell did you say!? 」

Zeth smirked while holding the key of the glass-covered door.

「You are a foolish goddess. You didn't wonder why Isister hasn't mentioned this method even though the ability value could double this easily? No one is immune to the gruesome mental contamination after transforming into the crazy warrior. Even those who endured this training have become completely insane. Well, I didn't tell any lies. No one dies from this after all.」

I was at a loss of words. Then, the door opened.

roars

Seiya, who turned into a crazy warrior, slowly appeared from the opened-door! The aura coming from his body was slightly different from an evil aura...It was "Madness"!

「Now, Ryuguuin has become a fighting machine that is only interested in battles!! Okay, let's destroy Isister's barrier and get out from this well for good!! And with this, I will officially start the Armagezedah Second!!!!!!」

Oh...Oh...Oh dear lord!! The Goddess of War, Zeth...she was really imprisoned on this well because of her disobedience and, now, she wants to be free!! This became a catastrophe after we asked for her help!!

My head hurt! Zeth laughed maniacally!

However, the crazy warrior was...

roars

He groaned furiously, but didn't move at all.

「Ah, oh my? You have to destroy the barrier! C'mon! Hurry! 」

「*roars* ...I refuse. 」

After a moment of silence. Zeth yelled aloud.

「You turned it down while groaning!? Do you still have a rational consciousness!? 」

「*roars* ...Crazy warrior release. 」

He spoke while groaning. Before long, Seiya's hair color returned to normal. His fangs were gone and his maddening state disappeared as well.

I was amazed. On the other hand, Zeth pointed to Seiya with her trembling finger.

「That...That's weird!! How is this possible!? He can't go back to being a human after he transformed into a "crazy warrior that is only interested in battles"!! 」

After hearing Zeth's words, I scratched my cheek awkwardly.

「Ah, well...Seiya was already interested in battles before meeting you... 」

Ever since we met, it's been only practice, practice, practice and more practice. I remembered that, even though Seiya was human, Celseus called him "Super Berserker" once.

「You were interested in battles as a human too? There is no such person! The opposite sex, play, food, sleep...There are many things that humans like! Don't you have any fun hobbies?」

「...What is she talking about? 」

「Ehhhhh!? 」

Seiya ignored Zeth's complains and turned to me.

「Let's go, Lista. There's no use in being here anymore. 」

「Ye...Yes! 」

—

We left the tunnel and tried to climb up the rope ladder of the well. Zeth chased after us.

「What's wrong with you!! What do you still want from us!? 」

「That...That's not it! I came to give an advice for Ryuguuin, as a comrade of that only exists for battles.」

Zeth spoke with a serious expression.

「Comrade Ryuguuin. Please, remember this. You won't be able to use magic or special skills during your Berserk mode. And, you should avoid increasing the phases. Especially the Phase 3rd, because your brain will surely collapse if you do. Only the Goddesses of War can achieve that fearsome phase.」

When Seiya snorted his nose, Zeth changed her mood.

「You're thinking, "I can do it", right? There are "boundaries that cannot be crossed" by a human being. If a human reaches the Phase 3rd, he will cease to be a human being forever! The Berserk mode scars will be engraved in the soul, and even if you return to your original world, the aftereffects will certainly remain within you! I am telling you everything about this because I recognized you as my fellow comrade!」

「...I'll remember it. 」

「You mustn't do it, you really mustn't do it, got it? 」

Then, Zeth raised the corners of her mouth.

「Well then, comrade Ryuguuin! With the State Berserk, I shall hope that you'll crush that world completely!」

「Yeah. I intend to do that. I'll crush it. 」

「No...You mustn't crush it...You have to save it... 」

We got out from the well and went through the forest. Yet, we could hear Zeth's strange loud words from behind our backs.

「Alas! I'm looking forward to meet you again! When we meet, we'll celebrate our own battles in a "twisted time-space"! Be fine until then...」

In the temple's dining hall, I smiled at Seiya when he took a third piece of bread.

「It would've been nice if you met Zeth when we tried to save Geabrande, right? Things could've been much easier back then!」

「No. Madness swirled in that tunnel, and I almost lost consciousness several times. I was able to endure the mental contamination because I had the destructive aura. Moreover, I've experienced the consequences of the Celestial Prison-Gate twice. Valkyrie knew that. So, I think she suggested me to meet the Goddess of War, Zeth, based on my experience.」

「Is...Is that so. It was a tough training after all... 」

Seiya drank a cup of water. Then, he spoke with determination...

「I want to practice a little more and be able to fully master the Berserker State. 」

After saying that, Seiya got up and headed to the cafe. Adenela was sitting on a chair while she drank her coffee tranquilly. On that instant, Seiya grabbed her as if he was grabbing a cat by its neck.

「Adenela. Let's practice. 」

「Ye...Yes! Let...Let's go! Let...Let's practice! 」

It seemed that they were headed to the summoning chamber. I wanted to follow the two of them, but Aria touched my shoulder.

「Lista. Lady Isister wants to see you. 」

「Eh? 」

Did...Did she find out that Seiya acquired Zeth's fearsome technique? Is...Is it going to be all right? Because the depths of the forest were said to be a place where the powers of the Great Goddess Isister couldn't reach.

「...So, Zeth ended up teaching him. 」

My heart stopped when I heard the words of the Great Goddess...

「Regardless of the success or failure of the Six-Hexagram, he wanted to acquire a sustainable power to go against the Grand Lion...He is cautious as ever.」

It seemed that she wasn't that angry.

「Even so, Listarte. Please, remember this. Even with Zeth's forbidden technique, his power will still fall short when compared to the power of the Grand Lion. I will say it again. Please avoid direct combat with the Grand Lion.」

「Ye...Yes! 」

「But if he utilizes Zeth's technique on a weakened Grand Lion after the usage of the Six-Hexagram, then things could change. The probability of success would be much higher than before.」

After smiling, the Great Goddess Isister tightened her expression a little.

「What happened in Galvano with the Cursed Sphere will happen again once you go to Tarmine. That place has become the home of the Grand Lion. That means you won't be able to return to the God's realm as long as you remain in Tarmine. Actually, you can use the portal to come and go to Tarmine as you please. However, the enemy will detect your presence once you do that. So, try not to use the portal as much as possible.」

「I understand! 」

「Finally. The Tarmine Kingdom is your home from when you were a human. There will be painful memories. But, I hope you'll have a disciplined behavior as a goddess...」

I gave my respects to the Great Goddess Isister and left her room.

...Painful memories. Aria was also worried about me. Still, I didn't have any memories of when I was Princess Tiana. Therefore, I didn't worry that much...

—

I arrived at the summoning chamber. I noticed that the door was open. When I ventured inside, I saw Seiya sweating a lot.

「What? Seiya, have you finished your practice already? 」

「Yeah. I tried to fight against a serious Adenela. And, I got a useful feedback from that practice. I've had enough for now.」

「Eh!! Don't tell me that you showed to Lady Adenela your State Berserk!? Even though you told me not to tell everyone else!？」

「I just didn't want anyone to disturb my training back then. There's no problem if they find out about it now.」

Then, Adenela peeped from the door with her creepy face.

「He...Hey, Lista. Co...Come here.」

After the door was tightly closed and the two of us were alone, she turned her dreadful eyes to me.

「Did...Did Zeth taught...Se...Seiya about...the crazy warrior skill? 」

「I...I am truly sorry!! 」

I bowed my head, but Adenela only exhaled a large sigh.

「Sorry, but...How was it? Did Seiya become stronger? 」

「Yeah. He...He became...ridiculously...strong. I...I won't come...across such a human...ever again.」

「Does that mean that he surpassed the power of your "double consecutive gunshot sword"!? Whoa!! Seiya is amazing after all!!」

I was shouting in admiration. But, Adenela had a face that didn't seem that pleased.

「No...No. Seiya was doing his best to protect himself from my Divine sword "Gliding Eagle".」

「Eh... 」

「Li...Lista. Se...Seiya is strong. Still, he is a hu...human. If...If there really...is...an enemy called Grand Lion that its ability value...equals...my power in full mode, then...Seiya will need...to...increase a phase of his crazy warrior state...but, that will be impossible to...accomplish...because he is a...human being.」

And then, Adenela told me a cruel truth.

「Se...Seiya won't be able to win. 」

—

「...Have you finished talking? 」

Seiya went outside of the door and asked me if I was done.

「Ye...Yes. 」

「Let's leave now. 」

「Seiya. Are you really ready? 」

After a moment of silence, Seiya spoke with confidence.

「Perfectly Ready. 」

...After hearing Adenela's words, I felt that our situation went from a positive hope to a dark disheartened scenario.

I wondered if Seiya knew that he was in a disadvantageous position on the fight against Adenela. No...It's Seiya we're talking. Maybe he knew exactly what was going on then. When he said "Perfectly Ready", he probably meant that the "Six-Hexagram will definitely succeed".

...However...If by any chance, the Six-Hexagram fails...what will happen to us...? No...No!! What was wrong with my thoughts!? I'm sure he decided we'll definitely succeed!!

Before negative thoughts spread any further inside my mind, I made the portal to Exfolia appear.

Chapter 70: The Former Tarmine Kingdom

Before we arrived in Exfolia through the portal, Seiya gave me a brief explanation for the upcoming strategy.

「First, I will do an investigation of the Tarmine Kingdom. Cave Along is safe, but there is a downside of doing that... If we stay hidden in the underground we won't be able to gather a good amount of information. It will be a bit dangerous, but we'll have to turn into beast men and walk on the surface.」

Seiya transformed into a dog beast man because the ratio of this type was quite high. Summing up, he wouldn't be able to stand out because of the numerous dog beast men that lurked around. He made me into a fish-man like always. Seiya became a powerful and elegant-looking Doberman. Compared to him, I was an ugly full-fledged red fish-man that resembled a goldfish. Well, at least it was a little better than the old tuna-head...It didn't bother me as much as before, I guess.

「By the way, I incorporated a special feature on that Bunogeos doll that I left sleeping in the town of Galvano. It will say "I will kill you" if someone tries to wake him up. It'll be fine for a while. But, I'd like to defeat the Grand Lion before they realize it is a fake. We have three or four days at most.」

After that, I made the portal appear and Seiya inserted an earth snake as usual. We finally went down the portal after securing the safety of our upcoming destination.

—

With the permission of the Great Goddess Isister, we arrived in a wasteland around the Tarmine Kingdom. We walked towards a Castle that we saw in the distance.

As we got closer, the whole landscape became visible. The walls of a huge Castle surrounded a town that was built within the perimeter of this military architecture. Still, those walls were collapsing, and none of that external protection made sense, not anymore.

As soon as I entered the town, I felt a very bad feeling. Perhaps this was related to the power of the evil god. From this moment on, we won't be able to return to the God's realm as long as we remain in the Tarmine Kingdom.

When I looked at my side, I noticed that Seiya, who turned into a dog beast man, was looking at me with sharp eyes. It meant that I "shouldn't speak the human language from now on." I nodded silently.

Seiya and I walked through a destroyed and dirty street. The scenery around us was in ruins, but the beast people were living in it. It seemed that these beasts were doing all sorts of businesses and trade inside of the old buildings that were previously made by humans. It was just like Galvano.

I smelled a strange and nauseating odor. When I looked over...

...Ugh...!

I almost made a sound. A charred human corpse without a head was chained from the eaves of a building. It was hung for everyone to see.

「Grilled Human. A Grilled Human please... 」

A lizard beast man was at the counter shop where the corpse was hanged at the eaves. After he ordered his food, I noticed that some dry human arms, legs and organs were arranged for him.

This was a scene from hell. The town of Galvano, which traded high-quality slaves, was a much better place than this. In Tarmine, humans were treated as complete food.

When I looked away, Seiya approached that nutrition shop.

「How much is it? 」

He must be joking, right!? Was he really going to buy a grilled human!?

I was astonished at first. But, in fact, he didn't want to buy it. Actually, it seemed like he was gathering information about this town. While listening to the price, Seiya realized that the beast people were using the currency that was previously used by the humans in Tarmine. The conversation continued.

「Oh. Then, you guys came all the way here from Galvano. 」

「Yeah. I heard that you are allowed to eat humans on this town. But, it looks like it's worth more than I thought it would be.」

「Humans are expensive. But, some of us can eat all they want as long as they become part of the Beast Emperor's party.」

「The Beast Emperor's party? 」

「It is a gathering of the special forces of His Majesty the Grand Lion. Only the strongest beast men will be able to enter. Some of us say that you'll be promised a rich life if you join the party. You'll be able to enter the royal palace as well. It's rumored that you'll get the protection of the evil god if you worship him on the temple of the royal palace.」

「Oh. So, how can I enlist to enter the Beast Emperor's party? 」

「They do an enlistment test in the town's square every day. You have to defeat your opponent and display your utmost strength.」

I thought that Seiya would want to go to the square immediately. Yet, he visited the shops in the street one by one.

Inside one of the shops, a bear-faced owner arranged some bizarre items such as skulls. It looked like a tool shop run by a beast man. The owner looked directly at Seiya, and raised the corners of his mouth because a new customer entered his shop.

「Hi. Do you want to buy something special? We recommend the “Amulet of the Evil God”. You’ll be able to receive a little protection if you take this with you.」

Seiya was looking with interest at the black tablet with some strange characters written on it. Eventually, he took out a sachet with money from his pocket.

「I’ll have some of that. 」

「Ehhh! I appreciate it! How many do you want? 」

I was stunned and speechless.

Se...Seiya! You mustn’t forget! These are our enemies! He’ll be suspicious if you try to buy a ridiculous amount like you always did before!

Seiya nodded when he felt my nervous look.

I was relieved! It seemed that he understood it!

「Owner. I’m sorry to ask this, but... 」

And then, Seiya spoke in an apologetic manner.

「Give me only thirty pieces. 」

No!! That was more than enough!! He probably tried his very best to reduce the amount he truly wanted to buy from this shop...But, that amount was still too much to ask for!! ...Now what!? The sense of a beast man is vastly different from a human’s!! I wondered if this could turn unexpectedly fine!?

However. The bear beast man changed his expression abruptly.

「You aren’t just asking for a few pieces!! You’re asking for an absurd number!! Moreover, it’s extremely strange to say that you want “only thirty pieces”!!」

This was bad!!!!!! Even the beast man thought it was a weird request!!!!!!

The owner screamed so loud that his voice was heard outside of the shop. The beast people, who passed through on that street, stopped by the shop to see what was going on.

Ah, c’mon!! We were getting a lot of unnecessary attention!!

「If that’s the case. Then, I’ll have five pieces. 」

Although that misunderstanding generated an unwanted ruckus, Seiya bought five “Amulets of the Evil God”. We headed to a weapon shop afterwards.

As soon as we came in, a frog-headed beast man recommended us an eerie sword with a red-black blade.

「Hi, customer. This sword is special because it sucks the human life, ribbit. It is very useful to make a human become dry like a dried fish, ribbit.」

Wha...What the hell was that abnormal sword!? It won't be of any use for us at all!! There was no need to buy such a thing...

Yet, Seiya took out the sachet with money.

「I'll take it. 」

No!! Don't tell me that he plans to buy it as well!! Why would he want that sort of sword!?

「Owner. I want a few, it's really just a few and it pains me to say it like this...But, give me only five.」

「Ribbit...!? Whe...Where can I get that huge amount for you, ribbit!? Besides, I don't think there are five identical swords out there, you know, ribbit!?」

chatter chatter...Once again, all the beast people that was inside of the shop and that passed through on the street looked at us to see what was happening...

—

I pulled Seiya's arm and took him to a place that wasn't crowded. I pointed to the ground silently. Seiya seemed to understand my intention. Therefore, he created earth snakes just to make sure that the surroundings were safe without the presence of beast men. After confirming that it was indeed safe for us, we went to the underground by the power of Cave Along.

In the dim light of the magical stones, I screamed directly at Seiya after the resentment accumulated inside of my body exploded.

「You'll be suspicious if you continue to behave strangely like that!! They will find out who you really are!!」

「Don't fret. There is no problem. 」

Seiya activated the art of change. Then, he transformed from a Doberman to a different breed, the Siberian husky. And, he also transformed me from a red-colored goldfish into a dull-colored goldfish.

「Just...Just how much can you change your appearance by using the art of change...Is it really that necessary to change it all the time!?!」

I yelled when I saw that the amulet and the sword were put right at my side. They were emitting a very evil aura that was starting to make me sick.

「I want to buy a greater variety of tools and weapons that are sold in this town. I have to do it as soon as possible. They might be useful someday.」

「That would make sense if this was a normal adventure, you know!? This is a town of beast men!! You can't use weapons like these!! They're creepy tools!! Besides, why don't you bring back my original form!? We're the underground now!! I hate the look of my disguise!!」

「It's true that nobody can see us now. Still, you women are such a pain in the ass. 」

After I kept complaining, Seiya finally used the art of change on me. Then, my body was wrapped in a dazzling light, and I returned to my beautiful goddess' visual. I grabbed a mirror that was hidden in the upper part of my dress and I tried to see my reflected image.

Phew! Ah...What a beautiful appearance I had compared to that ugly fish! ...Yes, I was too dignified to be compared with a fish in the first place!

「By the way, Seiya. I'm sure you have a plan for the future, don't you? 」

「Of course. I'll have to use the secret of the Six-Hexagram if I want to defeat the Grand Lion. I've already prepared a simulation for that.」

Seiya began to talk indifferently, but with a serious expression on his face.

「First, I have to pass on the enlistment test to become part of the Beast Emperor's party. After that, I will be able to invade the royal palace. Then, I will set up the Six-Hexagram that I've learnt from Isister around the temple, where the origin of the power from the evil god resides. And then, we have to get a part of the Grand Lion's body to proceed with the preparation. Well, his hair might be the easiest to get. After that preparation, a "Sword Dance of Crushing the Evil" has to be performed for three hours within a radius of 500 meters away from the Grand Lion. This part has restrictions. No one can see anything of this preparation during the sword dance. Once the sword dance is over, the secret of the Six-Hexagram will be completed. And then, the Grand Lion will be weakened.」

Seiya spoke without stopping. There were so many steps to do for that huge preparation. Somehow, it all sounded a bit troublesome. Especially, the last part...

「So, the "Sword Dance of Crushing the Evil", right? Won't that be hard to accomplish? It would be almost impossible to prevent others from getting near the Grand Lion during that time...」

「Isister also said that that was the most difficult part of the preparation. The ritual won't be efficient once someone sees it. And if that happens, I won't be able to use that against the Grand Lion again. But, I have Cave Along. So, there won't be any problem if I perform the secret of the sword dance while I hide in the underground of the royal palace.」

「I...I see! That's right! 」

「...The problem is you. 」

Then, Seiya stared at me with cold eyes.

「If I could, I would rather choose to put you in a frozen sleep and let you be dormant for a very long time...But, Aria and Isister told me that saving Exfolia was a punishment that you shouldn't avoid. Therefore, I hate it. I absolutely hate it how things turned out. Still, I have no choice but to take you with me.」

「I apologize for forcing you to take me along with you!! 」

When I shouted, Seiya approached me with his hand instantly.

screams

I screamed when I thought that Seiya was about to scold me. But, nothing happened. Seiya didn't beat me at all. Instead, something originated from the muddy wall of the dark cave and crawled over to the ground at an unstoppable speed! It passed through my legs rapidly and went inside of my own dress!

screams even louder

I yelled so high after I felt a horrible sensation of being touched all over the body.

「Wha...Wha...What did you do!? 」

「I hid several of powerful earth snakes in your body. You'll just have to stand still during the enlistment test. If you do that, the earth snakes will defeat the opponent without hesitating.」

「Eh, yes...Is that so... 」

When I looked down at the upper part of my dress, I noticed that the earth snakes were moving in circles around my chest and abdomen. It was definitely creepy. Therefore, I tried to avoid seeing this repugnant scene.

「There is a possibility that you and I will be separated after the enlistment test. But, even if that happens, the earth snakes will protect you. 」

Ah, what...Did he think about my well-being just now? Seiya did care about me after all...

Just when I thought about that, my eyes hardened with frustration to the words I heard next.

「By the way, the earth snakes also serve as an extra surveillance. They have a specific command to eat your throat if you try to speak the human language after transforming into a fish-man.」

「That's a very awful command!! You don't have to be that extreme just to stop me from speaking!!」

Seiya proclaimed peacefully regardless of my tantrum.

「You will be secondary or even be in third place for the purpose of this plan. The Six-Hexagram is the only safe and reliable way to defeat the Grand Lion. I will give it absolute priority over everything else.」

「Hmm!! Fine!! I should be the one to say the exact same thing!! 」

「...Whom are you referring to. 」

Seiya, whose arms were folded gallantly, was overflowing with exceptional confidence. I felt slightly relieved to see Seiya's self-assurance even though I was treated coldly as always.

...It looked like every preparation was ready. That was to be expected of Seiya. A secret action for infiltration. This man was really an outstanding hero. No other hero would have the guts to save a world like this one other than Seiya himself. It was useless to be worried about him after all...

The anxiety, which I felt in the God's realm vanished before I knew it.

Chapter 71: Enlistment Test

We transformed back into a dog and fish-man beasts respectively. We emerged from a secluded location and went directly towards the town's square.

When we approached the square, I saw a big crowd of beast men. Everyone was waving their fists in a very exciting way. Their voices were loud and rough.

I slipped through the beast people and headed to the center of the square. Soon, I could see the whole picture. They were standing in a circle that surrounded an open space with four piles stuck in the soil. Ropes separated these piles. Apparently, this was the place where they made the enlistment test. It looked like a one-on-one fighting sport on a ring that resembled a wrestling ring. Many of the beast people around me were enthusiastic spectators.

On one of the piles, a crow-headed beast man began to yell aloud.

「Caw! Caw! Attention! Attention! Who are the challengers for today's fight? 」

Seiya approached the crow beast man and raised his hand.

「Let us join. The challengers are this fish-man and me. 」

「Okay, understood! All right, let's start the enlistment test now! 」

Then, a large tiger beast man appeared from the other side of the diagonal of the pile. He walked with a fearsome attitude towards Seiya and I. I wondered if he was our opponent.

However, the situation was a bit strange. The tiger beast man brought someone with chains, whose head was covered by a linen bag. We couldn't see his face because of that bag, but his foot was chained with an iron ball.

The tiger beast man pushed that prisoner to the ring. Because of that aggressive push, the prisoner stripped and his linen bag fell from his head.

...Eh!? It...It can't be!!

I was dumbfounded. It was a "human". He was tall and had a short hair. He probably was between his late thirties or early forties. His arms and legs were robust and muscular. He looked like a warrior, but his eyes were lifeless and his skin-color was brownish like soil. His legs were quite damaged and his body was full of patches. Moreover, I noticed something weird that overflow from the body of that human being...

...The smell of death!

「...An undead, I see. 」

When Seiya muttered that next to me, the crow-headed beast man screamed “Caw! Caw!” extremely high as if it were laughing.

「This thing was once the famous general of the Tarmine Kingdom. Well, right now this thing is a “toy that doesn’t die”.」

...Te...Terrible! They transformed the Tarmine general into a zombie...!

「Humans are food or toys. 」

After laughing wickedly, the crow beast man pushed Seiya’s back into the ring.

「C’mon now, just go and beat him! If you do that, then you’ll pass the test! I’ll put you in the Beast Emperor’s party!」

The beast people started to scream and cheered extremely high when they heard the crow beast man’s words. Everyone was waiting for the Seiya-Dog beast man to start the fight in the ring.

Nevertheless. Seiya shook his head.

「Don’t get me wrong. I said that “I wanted to join”, but I didn’t say that “I want to take the test at this precise moment”. I’d like to watch first.」

「Is...Is that so. Well then, shall the fish-man over there take your place instead? 」

「No. This guy is watching with me. We’ll do it later. 」

...There was a slight booing from the crowd, but Seiya did not seem to bother. He sat down near a pile and watched the match attentively. I sat next to Seiya.

Meanwhile, a new challenger was determined. Unlike Seiya, a gray-brown rat beast man dived below the rope and rushed to the ring without hesitation.

I tried to see the status of the rat beast man. The attack and defense powers were both more than fifty thousand points. He had a fairly high status when compared to the thirty thousand points from the beast men that we’ve encountered in Galvano.

「Let’s start with the enlistment test! 」

The crow beast man declared the start of the fight. At the same time...

「Gigigi! 」

The rat beast man stripped his fangs with a killing expression, and attacked the undead. And then, the beast ripped the bottom of the opponent’s throat. The neck was cut more than half and black blood spilled from the body of the undead.

I thought it was a wresting game, but this was...

「...I caught you. 」

The undead muttered in a low voice even though he received a brutal and mortal wound on his neck. The undead's right hand grabbed the face of the rat beast man.

On that instant, we heard a..."smashing" sound. It sounded as if a juicy fruit was squeezed by someone's hand. The rat beast man's face was crushed on the spot and he was defeated immediately.

...Stro...Strong! That undead...was extremely strong!

The former general turned-undead looked up at the sky and roared.

「For the Tarmine Kingdom...and for that person's sake...I will kill as many beasts as I can...!」

His eyes were full of determination even though he was dead. I activated my clairvoyance ability to see the status of the undead that stood victoriously inside of the ring.

General John Dae

State – Undead

Level – 59

HP – 172234

MP – 0

Attack – 119874

Defense – 98111

Agility – 82

Magic – 0

Potential – 698

Resistance – Poison, Darkness

Special skills – Decay Regeneration (Lv 3)

Skills – Death Squeeze

Personality – Honest

...What a formidable ability value! How can someone win against that!

The crow beast man spoke at my side after we witnessed the fearsome fight.

「Even if he is a toy, you shouldn't underestimate him. The Beast Emperor's party is made of powerful elite beasts. With that said, the enlistment test won't be an easy feat to pass obviously. The failure of this test will be...death for the loser.」

When I looked at the ring again, I noticed that the ripped neck of the undead general was restored back to its original place. Besides his strong ability value, he also possessed a very terrifying special skill called "Decay Regeneration". The power of that skill didn't activate immediately during the battle, but over time, his dead body gradually healed.

The crow beast man looked directly at Seiya's face.

「What's wrong? Are you scared? 」

「No. My decision to take this test remains unchanged. 」

「Caw! Caw! What a great spirit! C'mon, go fight now! 」

And then, the crow beast man moved the rope for Seiya to get inside of the ring, yet he didn't move one inch.

「...Hey. What are you doing? You are fighting now, aren't you? 」

「No. I'd like to observe a little more. 」

「Do...Do you want to watch again! I thought you wanted to participate in the enlistment test right now by the flow of your conversation....!」

「That's what you decided yourself. I'm not going yet. 」

I...I thought that he was going to fight now as well...! But...it was actually fine! It was a good idea to observe a little more of the upcoming fights!

Seiya and I started to watch the next enlistment test. The second challenger was a snake beast man. His neck extended and wrapped around the body of the undead general. The beast man tried to strangle the opponent. However, the undead grabbed the snake's head and smashed it as he did with the rat beast man.

The crow beast man spoke then.

「Originally, the undead are beings that move slowly. But, in that thing's case, he doesn't possess much agility because of the iron ball chained on his foot. Even so, you'll be smashed if you get caught. The key of this test is to defeat him without getting near to him.」

「Yeah. I guess you're right. 」

Then, the crow beast man moved the rope and tried to call Seiya to step inside the ring. But, Seiya shook his head again.

「I want to observe a little longer. 」

「How long do you plan on watching!? You sure lack a lot of motivation, don't you!? 」

The crow beast man screamed violently, but still, Seiya did not move.

Even if the opponent was strong, Seiya could win without problems based on his powerful status...! Still, this hero was cautious as ever...!

...After the third challenger, a sheep beast man, was destroyed by the undead general, Seiya finally moved forward after standing by for a long time.

「All right. I should go now. 」

「Really? Are you finally going to fight? I was beginning to think that you were teasing me...」

Seiya, disguised as a dog beast man, walked to the ring where the undead general awaited.

「Great! Let's start the new enlistment test! 」

After the crow's declaration, Seiya shook his right arm and aimed directly at the undead. The chest of the undead became torn the moment Seiya punched it. In fact, the attack was probably efficient due to the altered Platinum Sword disguised by the art of change.

The undead, who couldn't move because of the chains, didn't avoid the attack. Instead of continuing with the offensive stance, Seiya stepped back after hitting him only once. The undead almost fell when he tried to grab Seiya.

After that, Seiya approached him again and hit the undead. As soon as he made that offensive strike, he stepped back immediately...This procedure was repeated a few more times. The undead's body became gradually chopped up. This ordeal took him to exhaustion...

「This...This damn dog...! 」

The undead general muttered words of hatred. Meanwhile, Seiya shook his nose.

「For an enemy like you, I only have to attack once and retreat immediately...“Hit and Run” is the most effective strategy against you.」

「Ugh! Don't take me as a fool...! 」

The undead general tried to grab Seiya desperately. Somehow, it looked like a play between an adult and a baby. I didn't want be Seiya's opponent at all.

「It's useless. Your movements are no longer efficient. 」

Seiya spoke confidently. I was not that surprised though.

...All I had to do was wait until this match was over for good...

After a while, the undead got on his knees as he lost all of his physical strength. Seiya slowly approached him after he confirmed his ineligibility state.

「Did you say "for the Tarmine Kingdom" moments ago? Nothing will change if an undead like you defeats just a few beast men.」

On that moment...

spitting sound

Seiya spit on the undead general!

「Scre...Screw you!!!!!!!!!! 」

He was enraged, but the little freedom his body possessed was long lost by now. He still had his regenerate skill, but it would take some time until he healed completely.

After beating and spitting on the undead general, Seiya looked down on him with icy eyes and said the following harsh words.

「Such a trash undead. 」

The winner was quite obvious in everyone's eyes. Soon, I could hear buzzing cheers! The undead general was looking at Seiya with hateful eyes as if he was looking at his fearsome enemy! Meanwhile...I trembled inside!

Absolutely no...no mercy!! I guess he had to be a ruthless enemy in order to pretend to be an authentic beast man...Even so, he was too harsh!!

When the crow beast man saw Seiya's battle strategy, he became excited and touched Seiya's shoulder.

「Hey, you're amazing! In addition to your overwhelming victory, your evil personality is also impeccable! All right! I'll recommend you to His Majesty the Grand Lion!」

Oh! He could easily get the hair for the Six-Hexagram if he approached the Grand Lion! This was exactly how Seiya planned it to be!

My heart beat in excitement. Suddenly, the crow beast man stared at me.

Well then, the next challenger will be this fish-man.

「Ugh...Glu... 」

I switched with Seiya and stood in the ring. Just a few meters away from me was the undead general. He was emitting some weird smoke out of his body and his injuries were gradually healed by the power of his disturbing skill.

「Beast man...! Beast man!!!!!!!!!!!! 」

He became so angry because of what Seiya did to him!!

I was so scared, but...

「Caw! Caw! Okay then, let's start the next enlistment test! 」

The undead general's regeneration was complete! Oh no! The enlistment test had begun!

「You bastard fish-man...! 」

The undead general was staring at me with a demonic face!

This should be fine, right!? The earth snakes will do something for me, correct!? I just had to stand up still, right!?

The recovered undead general rushed towards my direction in a fury!

「I'll turn you into a baked fish!!!!!!!!!!!! 」

screams inside of her mind What the hell was he talking about!? Seiya told me to stand still, but I'll be killed if I remain immobilized in this spot!!

The undead general was about to reach me.

boing

I heard a weird sound coming from my feet.

...Eh?

When I looked below, I saw that a big fish fell from my body.

Do...Don't tell me that this thing was once the earth snakes that Seiya wrapped around my body!? It became a figure of a big fish with the power of the art of change!?

boing boing

In addition, another fishes dropped from my crotch without notice! The beast people, that watched this fight as spectators, screamed at the sight of this spine-chilling occurrence!

「Wha...What's up with that guy!? He gave birth to babies that fell from his crotch!! 」

「But, fishes give birth to eggs, isn't that right!? 」

「Either way, why did it give birth during the enlistment test!? 」

「That creepy fish-man!! That is disgusting!! 」

What's this!! I was feeling very embarrassed by all of this!!

But, apart from my feelings, the situation had to be resolved. On that moment, a couple of other fishes fell from my crotch and began to crawl in the ground with an astonishing speed! They went crawling in the undead general's direction! They grabbed the undead general's legs and began to bite furiously without mercy!

excruciating screams

I thought he wouldn't feel any pain because he was an undead. Nonetheless, it was too painful to see what was happening to him. It looked like he was in a pond full of carnivore piranhas. His legs were being scraped off at a tremendous speed. The surrounding area was full of meat pieces that were ripped from his body. The undead general shouted in vain.

「Ba...Bastard...You filthy bastard!!!!!!!!!!!! You damn fish!!!!!!!!!!!! 」

Before long, the undead general's legs were completely devoured and he fell to the ground.

「The undead is unable to fight! He is finished! 」

「That fish-man was incredible! He didn't even get his hands dirty! 」

「Ah! The fish that gave birth ended up winning the fight! 」

The spectators were looking at me with eager eyes as if they were expecting something.

...Eh...Well.

I looked at Seiya and he nodded slightly in silence.

Therefore...

「Glu!!!!!!!!!!!! 」

I waved my hands to the sky and roared with a sound of victory. After hearing my high fish voice, the spectators gave a grand round of applause and cheered massively.

...It was brief, but I felt a good little feeling inside of me.

Chapter 72: The Fool Tower

Seiya and I followed the crow beast man. He was heading to the royal palace.

When I approached the restricted area, I noticed that the Tarmine's royal palace was in ruins. It probably became this damaged because of the previous war between humans and the Demon King's army. We walked past the gates guarded by armored beast men, and then we arrived at the royal garden in front of the ruined palace.

...Did I live here when I was a...human being?

I looked closely at the unkempt garden that was no longer beautiful. Everything was devastated and wild weeds grew everywhere. But, I didn't remember anything about this place. I stood in front of a huge royal palace that was probably my previous home. Yet, I didn't feel any emotion or attachment for this place.

The Great Goddess Isister and Aria were extremely worried about me. They feared that my soul would react incessantly when I arrived to this place. They believed that unwanted emotions would cloud my judgment. Nonetheless, I felt relieved that none of that happened to me so far. It would be troublesome if my memory returned and I became overly emotional. If that happened, I would be a hindrance to Seiya's strategical plans.

While I was engrossed by those thoughts, Seiya followed the crow beast man and entered the royal palace. When I tried to follow them hurriedly...

「Hey. You come this way. 」

「...Glu? 」

Before I knew it, a horse beast man pulled my arm.

...Eh!? I wasn't supposed to enter the royal palace as well!?

「Glu! Glu, glu, glu! 」

As fish-men cannot talk, I tried to gesture with my fishy hands while pointing to the royal palace and to myself alternatively. The horse beast man noticed that I tried to speak with him. When he saw my intentions, he explained the following.

「You certainly passed the enlistment test. 」

「Glu! 」

I thought "Yes!", so I nodded in agreement.

「You are now a member of the Beast Emperor's party. 」

「Glu! 」

「You are strong. 」

「Glu! 」

「But, you are...a stinky fish. 」

「Glu!? 」

「His Majesty the Grand Lion hates fish-men. It's unfortunate, but I can't let you enter the royal palace.」

Wait!! What the hell was that supposed to mean!!

「Even so, you are a strong beast man that passed the enlistment test. So, I will give you an important task.」

And then, the horse beast man pointed to the tower that stood far away from the royal palace.

「That's the "Fool Tower". I'll be taking you to the top of that high place. 」

—

When we entered the ground floor of the high tower, I noticed that a long spiral staircase continued until the top. It was a very tall tower by the looks of it. I wondered if it was originally a watchtower to protect the Tarmine's royal palace from external enemies.

「You can make this place your new home. 」

He introduced me to a small room at the end of the first floor. When he opened the door for me, I saw that this room had enough space for one person to relax. There were also desks, chairs, and a bed inside of this room.

After that, the horse beast man began to climb up the long spiral staircase. I followed the horse beast man silently through the stairs. As expected of a strong beast man like himself. He walked up without stopping. He sure did have a strong physical strength. When my legs started to become numb after climbing that insane amount of stairs, the spiral staircase came to an end at the top of the tower.

There was nothing at the top of the tower, except for a wooden door at the center. I wondered if this place was my supposed task. It looked as if they were guarding something inside. Maybe I would have to keep watch and make turns with other watch beast men. The horse beast man pulled a key from his pocket and asked me while he tried to open the door.

「Do you know why we call this tower the "Fool Tower"? 」

「Glu? 」

「Because there is a fool living in here. A fool without pain. 」

When the door opened, I saw an old woman sitting in a dimly lit, narrow room. She had handcuffs on her wrists and iron balls were chained on her feet. She was dressed like a sinner because of her rag cloth. Yet, she had a slight dignified expression on her tired-looking face.

「This is Carmilla, the Queen of the old Tarmine Kingdom. 」

My eyes became widely open when I heard the words of the horse beast man.

The Queen!? She...She was alive!! I thought that everyone from the royal family was murdered!!

...I thought that she would be much younger. Still, she was very thin, her face was full of wrinkles, and she had a lot of grey hair. Queen Carmilla looked like an old woman in her sixties.

「This Queen is the only human of the royal palace that it's currently alive. His Majesty the Grand Lion spared her life temporarily. But, this is bothersome. I'll be thankful if she decided to jump from the tower to commit suicide.」

The Queen, who heard the whispering of the horse beast man, told him arrogantly.

「I will not commit suicide. I am a priestess who values life. 」

Her voice trembled, but I could feel a strong spirit in her words. The horse beast man showed me a table on the corner of the room. There were various strange tools such as needles and grilles lined up on that table.

「I've been doing all sorts of torture. But, this woman doesn't feel any pain. 」

Then, he put his hands on my shoulders.

「Listen. Your job is to hurt this woman. 」

「...Glu? 」

「Call me if she shows a little pain. His Majesty the Grand Lion will surely be delighted.」

What...Was I instructed to be a torture instigator!? What a horrible job this turned out to be...

The horse beast man spoke happily without knowing that my heart was conflicted.

「Well, you can do many things to her if you want. But, don't kill her. And remember, she has to eat once a day.」

After a brief explanation, the horse beast man opened the door and left the room.

Now what? In this narrow space, only the fish-man and the Queen of the Tarmine Kingdom were left behind.

...This...This person was the mother of my previous human self...!?

I was staring fixedly at her, but I couldn't remember anything at all. The memory of a soul was quite different from the memory of a brain. Nothing came to my mind no matter how much I tried to remember.

「...What are you looking at, you filthy fish. 」

Suddenly, I noticed that the Queen was looking at me with wrinkles between her eyes. The iron balls chained her legs. Nonetheless, she approached me by crawling on the floor.

「Do you have something to say? 」

「Ugh...Glu, glu! 」

I shook my head continuously. The Queen frowned.

「Ah, this fish stinks. Really, this fish stinks so badly. I see, so this is a new type of torture.」

No!! It wasn't supposed to turn out like this!!

「You can't speak any words other than "glu glu". You're a very creepy and smelly beast.」

The Queen pinched her nose and continued to talk.

「C'mon. Don't keep staring at me like that and bring me some food. I'm hungry. 」

「Glu? 」

Fo...Food? Where could I get that? Let's see...

Then, she yelled at me by using an unfriendly tone.

「My food was placed in your room on the first floor! Quickly! I'm going to eat you if you don't hurry up!」

「Gluuuu!?! 」

I tried to run away and jumped out of the Queen's room.

...What a strong-willed person...! She had been tortured, and still, she had the courage to show that kind of attitude...! My mother was totally different than what I imagined her to be...!

When I returned to my assigned room on the first floor, I saw that they placed a loaf of bread on the top of my newly desk.

So, she only ate one piece of this a day. No wonder that she looked frail and was starving badly. By the way, I was starting to feel a bit hungry as well...

Then, I noticed a basket covered with a dust cloth right next to the bread.

Ah! This was probably my food!

But, after I took the cloth, I became speechless.

...It was two grilled arms of a human being.

screams on her mind How could I eat such a gruesome thing!! ...Does that mean that...Ehhh...I won't be able to eat any food for a while!? Oh no...

I sat down in the bed feeling quite discouraged. I took a big sigh.

Ah...I even got separated from Seiya. Wouldn't it have been better for me if I waited quietly inside of the Cave Along? ...No...No! I mustn't have these sorts of thoughts! I am a goddess! This was the right time to show that I'm worthy! I must become a reliable comrade in a tough adventure like this one! That's right! I could do many things as well! For example, try to learn about a secret path without putting our lives at risk, or try to look for rare items that could be useful for Seiya...!

While I thought deeply about my role, suddenly...

boing

A fish fell to the floor from my crotch.

「Glu!? 」

Astonishingly, the fish transformed into sand and began to draw some letters on the floor.

『I'll say this just in case. Don't think too much. You don't have to do anything. 』

...I was looking at Seiya's "Earth Magic Message" on the floor. He was cold-hearted as always.

This...This message was a warning! He was trying to prevent me from bringing any unnecessary trouble...Okay! Okay! I got it! Ah, that's right! I see! So, this was another preparation from his meticulous plan!

Eventually, the letters disappeared, and a new message was written on the floor.

『Come to the royal garden in the evening. That's all. 』

All of the scattering sand became one again and transformed back into a fish. That thing jumped to my legs abruptly and crawled vigorously to my crotch!

screams

I shouted without thinking after feeling that weird sensation.

Da...Dangerous! Thank goodness that no one was nearby! But...But, where on earth did that fish go? It wouldn't have entered a strange place, would it...?

I tried to look for it under my crouch, thinking "where is it?". Suddenly...

boing

A new fish fell down.

Ahhhh!? Another one came out from my crouch!? What...What did he want this time!?

Then, the fish looked at me and opened his mouth extremely wide.

「Gee. 」

That fish vomited an apple-like fruit from his mouth!

...Ah? What's this...Eh, I see! Seiya prepared food in advance! He anticipated that we wouldn't be able to eat properly while we were disguised as beast men!

I felt a little bit grateful for the thoughtfulness of my cautious hero...

「Gee. 」

Then, the weird fish vomited an orange-like fruit and stared at me with his creepy white eyes.

...This...This fish...I wondered why he looked at me like that...Did he want something...?

...On this moment, that fish formed a human arm and made me eat that fruit forcibly.

—

I grabbed the bread and went to the spiral staircase. When I arrived at the top of the tower, I opened the door of the Queen's room.

「It took you a long time. 」

The Queen spoke to me with an irritating tone.

「...Glu... 」

I immediately offered the bread to the Queen. She received it gladly and took a bite immediately. After a brief contentment, she spoke in a strict manner once again.

「Hmm. So, what are you planning to do? Are you going to torture me now? Are you going to stick a needle on my fingers? Or are you going to press a burning mark on my belly? ...Well, I should tell you that everything you'll do will be useless against me. You heard it, right? I don't feel any pain.」

The Queen had a sarcastic smile on her face. After she said those words, I looked closely at her arms.

Burn marks. Cuts. She was full of bruises. My heart hurt after imagining the countless wounds that she might have under her clothes due to the repeated series of torture.

She looked strong spirited. But, I wondered how much she had to endure until now. The Grand Lion was a vicious and evil being. If it were a normal person, I'm sure that they would beg for their own death... Choosing death would seem to be a better choice than enduring this endless horrible torture.

...I had no memory of my life as a human being. However, I felt pathetic after seeing how cruelly this old woman was treated. My divinity as a goddess was reacting badly.

Before I noticed it, I began to stroke the Queen's hand.

「Wha...What's wrong with this fish. 」

「Glu... 」

「No way, are you feeling sorry for me? You filthy beast. 」

When the Queen pushed my arm away from her, she looked awkwardly at me.

「...What a strange beast you are. 」

I had a weird sensation on my body afterwards. I hit the lower half of my stomach when the rummage increased.

On that occasion, a fish fell from my crouch, and the Queen stepped back hurriedly with an alarmed look.

「Hey, you!! What are you doing!? You gave birth to a fish all of a sudden!! 」

But, the fish that fell on the floor...

「Gee. 」

It vomited an orange. I gave it to the Queen.

「Glu, glu! 」

「Are you giving that to me? ...But, is that thing...edible... 」

I peeled the orange straightaway. Then, I ate a little piece to show her that it wasn't poisonous. After showing that it was safe, I gave it to the Queen.

「Glu! Glu, glu! 」

After she ate that orange, she said...

「...You really are a strange beast. 」

The Queen laughed a little bit. Her smiling face was truly gracious. How noble and kind she must have been from her tenure as Queen of this former Kingdom.

But, right on this moment. The Queen lost her smile and hardened her face when we heard a crying scream. That ominous sound reached the top of the tower, and my body trembled without stopping.

...What was that just now? It sounded like a human scream...!

The Queen slowly approached the window covered with an iron grid.

「Another human execution. 」

She spoke with a calm voice without showing much emotion.

「The Grand Lion locked me on this tower because the execution ground was visible from this room. Seeing others die before my eyes, and hurting me. That monster is trying to do anything he can to make me cry.」

Queen Carmilla laughed with a dry and impassive voice.

「It's useless. My tears dried up a long time ago. 」

—

It was evening. Therefore, I went to the royal garden just as the Earth Magic Message instructed me to do.

I didn't see anybody in the royal garden. No one was there, neither a dog beast man nor Seiya.

I wondered if I came little early. But, when I walked on a grassy corner of the garden...

slurping sound

My feet suddenly collapsed and I fell abruptly!

「Glu...!? 」

I fell with my bottom. When I looked up, I realized that I was inside of the Cave Along. Seiya, having returned to his original human form, was looking down on me.

「Hmm. You screamed “glu” when you fell over. It seems that your startling voice remained as a fish-man. I praise you for that.」

「Hey you!! Why can't you be a little gentler when you push me inside!! 」

I asked Seiya after he returned my goddess' form.

「...So, how has it been going for you? 」

「I've only done a few inspections inside and outside of the royal palace so far. Between those inspections, I practiced with other beast men. Tomorrow, I will proceed with the preparations. More importantly...」

Then, Seiya stared at me with sharp eyes.

「It seems that that tower you're staying now houses an important prisoner, am I correct? 」

Gosh! He already knew about that! Information sure did spread quickly!

When I tried to say that, “she was my mother when I was a human being”...

「I don't know who she is, and I'm not interested to find out. Lista, listen. You mustn't get involved with that person more than necessary. There is a risk of things getting out of control if this keeps going on. Therefore, you shouldn't do any unnecessary actions.」

「I saw your Earth Magic Message, you know. Don't worry I won't do anything at all.」

「I'll tell you one important thing. “A motionless Lista is a good Lista”...Remember that.」

「Shouldn't you say, “no news are good news”! Why do you always have to say rude things instead! What an insolent human you are!」

「I worry that you'll do unnecessary things. Therefore, I have to constantly keep reminding you of that.」

Then, Seiya's sharp eyes became icy.

「Don't forget this is the home of the Grand Lion. In order to minimize the risk of suspicion, we shall meet again at the end of the preparations. Come to this place at the same time, three days from now. Until then, I will definitely formulate correctly the Six-Hexagram for the final stage. That's all.」

After a brief conversation about the impending “business”, we transformed to our beast men disguises with the art of change. An earth snake explored the surroundings and, after confirming our safety, we emerged from the underground on different locations and went separate ways.

After parting ways with Seiya, I went back to my room on the first floor of the Fool Tower and I laid my body on the bed.

...Ah...It seemed that Seiya wasn't particularly worried about my well-being after all. He cared about me when we were in Geabrande...No...No! I shouldn't let my mind get engrossed by those feelings anymore! Both Seiya and I were just “the goddess and the summoned hero”! Our relationship wasn't deeper than that!

I went to sleep after clearing my mind. I only tried to think about the success of the upcoming Six-Hexagram strategy.

Chapter 73: Rebellious Monster

The Next day.

The horse beast man came to my room on the first floor of the Fool Tower.

「Have you tried to torture her? 」

「Glu. 」

「So, how was it? 」

「Glu...」

I moved my shoulders up and down. The horse beast man just sighed. After all, he wasn't that surprised by my answer.

「No one has succeed in making her feel pain. There's no rush. 」

And then, he left the room.

—

At the top of the Fool Tower, in the prisoner's room.

When I offered Queen Carmilla an apple she twisted her head in confusion.

「...Aren't you going to torture me today? 」

「Glu! 」

I tried to give her a smile...But, I wasn't sure if I was able to smile properly as a fish-man.

「I wonder what are you planning to do with me, you filthy fish. 」

After she said that, the Queen didn't eat the apple immediately. She probably thought the fruit might have been poisoned with some weird substance. She was a little bit more cautious about me than she were yesterday.

Seiya warned me "don't do any unnecessary actions". He was worried that I would be a hindrance to his Six-Hexagram preparation. Therefore, it would be a wise choice to remain with the Queen until he defeats the Grand Lion. I will have to continue doing this pretend torture act until then.

「...Do you have more? 」

「Glu? 」

「I mean...that...fruit. 」

The Queen was a little embarrassed to ask for more fruits. Therefore, the earth snake-turned-fish vomited an orange and a freshly apple from its mouth. And, I tried to give them to the Queen...

「Glu!? 」

My legs stumbled on a chair and I fell over. When I tried to get up quickly, my head hit against the desk.

「What are you doing? You're such a clumsy fish. 」

I tried to clean the dust from the fruits that fell on the floor. On that moment, the Queen raised her voice and started to laugh aloud.

「*laughs* Somehow, I suddenly remembered my daughter when I saw you like that! 」

Ehhh!? She remembered her daughter by seeing a clumsy fish-man!? Well...Well, that reasoning might be a little distorted, but in a sense, she was not far from the truth!!

「She was clumsy like you. She was a child who couldn't do anything else other than healing magic. Ah, but she was pretty good at it. She was a fine mage and, the veterans and the townspeople called her the "Funny Razor Princess".」

...The people didn't think I was stupid, but funny!?

However, the Queen spoke in a slightly somber tone.

「But, that "Funny Razor" didn't come back after she went with the chosen hero to fight against the Demon King. Afterwards, I heard that the Demon King killed everyone...」

「...Glu. 」

I glanced at the Queen's face. She was probably crying...But, I was wrong. The Queen raised the corners of her mouth and smiled at me.

「You know, I don't believe on that story at all! That girl is pretty strong against bad luck! She probably escaped her death just like me! I bet she is living somewhere out there!」

Then, she burst a cheerful laugh.

...Hmm...Well...She was right about half of that story though...

Anyway, I was glad to see the Queen more energetic than yesterday.

After eating the fruit, I massaged the Queen's shoulders. At first, she was reluctant, but eventually, she accepted it. After I massaged her whole body as well, she felt asleep on her tattered bed.

I put a blanket on the Queen. Then, I returned to my room.

I was worried about only one thing when I was alone in my newly beastly room. Seiya.

...Seiya...Was he okay? He was probably fine given how cautious he usually is... surely he was okay...

—

And then, the next day.

I felt uneasy when I thought about Seiya. I was worried about him and I couldn't just ignore those feelings. But, there wasn't anything I could do. Therefore, I did what I was supposed to do in the Fool Tower. I took the bread with me and went up to the spiral staircase.

After unlocking the door, I entered the Queen's room and offered her the bread and a fruit.

After eating her meal, the Queen asked me the following.

「...What about torture? 」

I shook my hand and head at the same time.

「Glu, glu. 」

「Is that so. 」

The Queen began to talk a bit more openly with me. She probably unlocked her heart, even if just a little.

「I didn't live without pain my whole life. However, my body became painless after the Demon King conquered this world. No matter how much they torture me, I won't feel any pain. I think what happened to me is a gift that God gave me.」

...Exfolia fell to the hands of the Demon King Artemaeus only a year ago. Even so, Tarmine became such a horrid place that quickly. The enemy killed all members of the royal family except the Queen. Moreover, the vassals became morbid toys and the townspeople became food. It wasn't hard to imagine the living hell made into reality.

She said it was a gift from God, but I wondered if her situation was due a mental symptom. I wondered if the Queen's sense of pain dulled after the wounds she received on her heart.

Still, the Queen uttered an energetic voice from her seemingly frail-looking body.

「I am sure that God is telling me "not to succumb to torture".」

Then, exactly at the same time...

「...You have such an extreme disheartened god.」

I heard an unexpectedly thick voice! When the Queen and I looked behind to see who talked, I became petrified immediately!

...It...It can't be...!!

The Grand Lion was standing by the door!

「So, your god gave you the power to endure torture instead of giving you the power to defeat the Demon King, huh. What a useless god you have there. Well... I wonder if such god exists in the first place...」

「Grand Lion...!」

The Queen changed her complexion and glared at the Grand Lion with hatred.

For...For how long as he been standing there!? I didn't feel his presence at all!!

However, he started to emit an overwhelming evil aura as soon as he spoke. It seemed that he could control both his aura and presence by his own free will.

The Grand Lion tried to approach me. But, on that instant, he frowned slightly and stopped walking. The horse beast man told me that he despised the smell of fish-men.

「Hey, fish-man. I'm sure that you heard the instructions before. I won't eat this old hag until I give those orders.」

「...Glu.」

「Seriously...It means that I won't kill this old hag until I see her miserable crying face.」

「Hmm. Would you kill me immediately after you see me cry?」

The Grand Lion looked at the arrogant Queen and became irritated. Then, he approached her furiously and grabbed her chest. The Queen's body slightly floated in the air.

「Shut up, you vixen. I hate your attitude. You're just skin and bones. I don't even know if you can beg for a life that doesn't even exist.」

The Queen fell to the floor when he opened his hand abruptly.

「Fish-man. You must find a way for me to see this old hag's miserable face. If you do so, I'll gladly give you and your species extra opportunities. Let's see...I'll give you a position in the royal palace and select you as a leader of a fighting unit. I'll make you as my aide.」

「Glu... 」

「I'll come see you again next time. 」

And then, the Grand Lion went out of the room.

...I...I wondered if he left for real...

I tried to check beyond the door for a few times carefully, just like Seiya would. But, I didn't see him anywhere.

I felt relieved that he was finally gone. When I looked back, I noticed that the Queen was giving me a needle.

「Glu? 」

「C'mon. Do as your boss says you to do. You should start torturing me quickly and seriously. Otherwise, you'll get hurt if you don't comply.」

「Glu, glu! 」

Still, I shook my head negatively. The Queen was surprised with my answer.

「The Grand Lion gave you that order, but you're still willing to refuse him! 」

After making an astonishing face, the Queen approached me promptly.

「I will tell you this because you seem like a beast with free will. Listen carefully. The Grand Lion promised you a place in the royal palace. But, you mustn't allow yourself to become the leader of a fighting unit. It will only accelerate your death time.」

「Glu? 」

「Do you know why the Grand Lion is creating fighting units of elite beasts in a world that was fully conquered by the Demon King? Because he is ambitious. He plans to kill the Demon King Artemaeus and become the true ruler of this world.」

...What!? Oh gosh, that's crazy!!

「I know that it's possible. The Grand Lion certainly has that power. I heard some beasts say that he is the "vessel to rule the world". Artemaeus tried to create an excellent subordinate. Yet, he created a terrible monster instead.」

I started to feel increasingly anxious. The Grand Lion's was assembling groups of fighting units which were deployed in the royal palace, just where Seiya was.

...Are you all right...Seiya...!

The Grand Lion's status wasn't the only thing that was outrageously fearsome. He also had a vicious and abysmal goal. Queen Carmilla confirmed that the "power of the vessel" was equally strong when compared to the Demon King Artemaeus.

—

The final day came. Today was the appointed day I had with Seiya. Seiya was supposed to reach the final stage of his Six-Hexagram plan by this evening.

It was a little earlier than what I agreed with Seiya. Nevertheless, I headed to the courtyard of the royal palace.

I went to the grassy corner of the devastated garden as I did once before...

slurping sound

I fell into the hole of Cave Along.

「...Lista. You're quite early today. 」

I felt glad that Seiya was safe. His usual bored demeanor remained unchanged.

「Seiya! I'm relieved! I thought that something bad happened to you! 」

「What are you talking about? I prepared the set up the Six-Hexagram stones around the temple within the royal palace. I also got some of the Grand Lion's hair without him noticing. The preparation has been done smoothly and the final stage is completely underway. After everything is ready, I will hide in the underground of the royal palace to perform the "Sword Dance of Crushing the Evil". After three hours, the Six-Hexagram will be completed, and the weakening of the Grand Lion will be successful.」

「I...I see...But, even so! The Grand Lion can hide his aura and presence as he wishes! I know that everything will get easier if the sword dance is successful, but until then, you shouldn't let your guard down...」

「I don't need you to warn me about that. I already knew it. There's no problem. 」

And then, Seiya looked at me as if he were looking at an idiot.

「The only problem remains the same, Lista. You. 」

「M...Me!? 」

「That's right. From now on, I'll be performing the "Sword Dance of Crushing the Evil" from about 10 meters above the ground inside of Cave Along. Normally, there would be no problem. Except for your existence...」

「Wha...What do you mean by that? 」

「It's just as Isister said before. You cannot open the portal to go to the God's realm while the power of the evil god is still activated. Still, it is possible to use the portal to move within Tarmine. In other words, you can break into my Cave Along area if you use the portal.」

Seiya stared fixedly at me with hawk eyes.

「The reason I asked you to come here at this imminent timing was to warn you about this. I must warn you until the very last minute that I don't want to be disturbed by all of your stupid actions.」

「Why say it like that!! 」

「Just to be sure, I will tell you this one more time. The secret of the Six-Hexagram is the only chance I have to defeat the Grand Lion. However, the sacred energy will be scattered the moment a third party sees the sword dance. If that happens, I won't be able to use it for the same enemy ever again. Failure is not acceptable.」

「I already know all of that!! 」

「Finally, one last word. 」

「There is still more!? You're so noisy!! 」

「I'll give absolute priority to the Six-Hexagram plan over anything else. That's all. 」

「Oh, is that so!! Speaking of which, I also have something to say to you!! The fish you inserted within my body doesn't have eyes to see what's happening in the surroundings, or am I wrong!? It's frustrating to think that you can see all of my actions!!」

「I didn't create it with that kind of specification. I'm not interested in your private life. However...」

When Seiya snapped his finger, I felt that something fell from my crotch.

boing boing boing

Fifteen fishes fell abruptly from my crotch.

「How many fishes did you put inside of my body!? 」

「I can put them inside of you again if you're that worried. You should be fine for only three hours. Well, I'll leave just one fish inside of you just for precaution.」

「You should just take them all out of me!! 」

「I refuse. I'll leave that one in you. It's not for your well-being. But, yes, for my own sake. 」

—

...I got out of the Cave Along in a fury. I didn't even look back at Seiya and walked away from the garden of the royal palace. While I climbed through the spiral staircase of the Fool Tower, I felt that my mind was going crazy.

...Ah, how frustrating! What's wrong with him! He treated me as an idiot once again! I didn't have any reasons to get on his way! Absolutely none!

That's right. Only three hours left. I just had to wait that long without doing absolutely anything, so that the Six-Hexagram could be completed without any problem.

Chapter 74: Mother

I went up through the spiral staircase and headed to the Queen's room.

The Queen had only one piece of bread a day. I felt sorry for her because of how poorly they treated her. Therefore, I tried to give a fruit for her dinner.

I gently opened the door while holding an apple in one hand. The Queen was lying in bed.

「Glu, glu? 」

I called her. But, she was on a deep sleep. I placed the fruit on top of her table, and then, I took the hand of the Queen.

...Soon...Pretty soon now. The hero was always a bit cold-hearted, but I was sure that he would succeed with the Six-Hexagram plan. Tarmine will be saved of sure. And finally, the Queen will be able to get out from this tower...

On that moment. Suddenly.

...Ah...What was this?

I noticed that the Queen was holding something in her right hand.

I became anxious, so I slowly opened the Queen's fingers one by one without interrupting her deep sleep. I took out the thing that she was holding tightly on her hand.

It was a small doll. It looked like a handmade girls' mascot. It was probably made a long time ago. It was old, worn-out and the color was washed out. Well, even if it wasn't dirty, this old doll was not made with very good workmanship. This handmade doll had weird proportions on her face and the hair was unkempt and out of place. This wasn't certainly a good work.

However, when I looked at its back and turned it upside down...I was surprised.

『From Tiana. To mother. 』

These letters were sewed on the backside of the doll with a black thread.

...Was...Was this perhaps a doll that I...I made when I was human...!?

On that instant. The old doll disappeared from my hand.

「...Such a weird old hag. How can she sleep on a place surrounded by beast men with a peace of mind. I never seen this happen before.」

「Glu!? 」

That rough voice froze my spine! When I turned around, I saw the large stature of the Beast Emperor...the Grand Lion was standing behind me with the doll he took away from my hands!

「Don't fret. I'm not going to threaten you. I was just a little bit curious. Yesterday, I noticed that that old hag's eyes were looking at you...in a different way. It was as if she wasn't looking at you with hatred. In fact, she can sleep this deeply even with a beast like you standing by her side.」

The Queen finally woke up because of our fuss. She saw the Grand Lion. Then, she hardened her face and took her defensive stance against him. However...

「Ah...! 」

She suddenly made a desperate voice when she looked at his right hand. The thing that seemed precious to her was in the hands of the Grand Lion.

「What's up, old hag. Is this your private little thing? Where have you been hiding this thing? Under the bed?」

「Ah, that doesn't concern you! Give it back! 」

The Queen, who was always calm and easygoing, was nervously exalted as if her blood was boiling hot. It seemed that the Grand Lion also sensed her unusual behavior. He stared at the doll even more.

「What is so important about this doll? 」

And then, the Grand Lion looked at the doll's back.

「"Tiana"...That was your daughter, wasn't she? I see, so it makes sense. Was this thing a gift from your daughter?」

「Gi...Give it back...! 」

The Queen walked from her bed and approached the chest of the Grand Lion. She tried to get the doll back by reaching the massive stature of the Grand Lion.

「Give it back! Give it back now! 」

「You damn vixen. You are annoying me. 」

With a roar of anger, he pushed the Queen away from him with the hand that didn't possess the doll. The Queen was blown away and fell on the floor.

「Glu! 」

I rushed to the Queen immediately. I tried to hold her up, but the Queen wasn't even looking at me. She was staring at the Grand Lion with distressed eyes.

「I beg you...Please, give it back... 」

The Grand Lion spit on the floor after he heard her pitiful voice.

「Is your dead daughter's thing that important? 」

「Tiana...Tiana isn't dead! 」

「Ah? What the hell are you talking about, you vixen old hag. I thought you knew that long ago. Your daughter died a miserable death at the hands of Artemaeus. Look, this is how she died.」

Then, the Grand Lion put some power on his hand and tried to smash the doll. The Queen's body trembled convulsively.

「Stop it...Give it back...! 」

But, on the next moment, the sound of torn fiber echoed in the air! The Grand Lion ripped the doll in half with the upper part separated from the bottom part! Then, he threw the doll to the floor!

「Tiana...! 」

The Queen uttered a quivering voice at the sight of the damaged doll.

...I was watching the Grand Lion's heartless actions while gritting my teeth. Of course, I wanted to stop it, but I didn't have enough power nor the strength to do it. But, it was hard for me to see the Queen suffering like that. So, at least, I hugged her from behind to give her my support.

「Ugh...! Tiana...Tiana...! 」

On that occasion...

dripping sound

Something fell on my arms after I gave my shoulder to the Queen to lean as support.

...Ehhh...! It can't be...! The Queen was...!

Tears were overflowing constantly from the Queen's eyes even though she never cried when she was tortured before.

「Hey, c'mon, c'mon...! You're crying...You're crying for real...! You're the old hag that didn't cry even once for a whole year! Is this dirty doll so important for you?」

I was also confused like the Grand Lion. Was the doll that I made when I was a human so important that even moved the Queen's heart? But...But, why did she go this far just for an old handmade doll...?

I looked attentively at the doll that was torn to pieces at my feet. I thought instinctively, "I want to know the reason why", and then, I activated my Appraisal skill without realizing it.

『A doll made for the Queen by a young princess Tiana... 【Warning!】 Do you really want to know more details?』

...War..."Warning"! What's that!?

I hesitated for a moment. Even so, I decided that I wanted to know the reason why the Queen behaved like that. I spoke that I wanted to "know" inside of my head.

Suddenly. On that moment, my head swirled and I felt dizzy.

—

...I was still on the top floor of the Fool Tower, and yet, my surroundings were black and white as if I were seeing a movie. The bedroom had a different feeling and the furniture was of high quality ...

「Mother! Mother! 」

A five-year-old girl in a white dress jumped around and ran energetically inside the room. In the corner of the room stood Queen Carmilla, who wore a similar colored dress. She tightened her expression.

「Tiana! Don't run! Its bad manners! 」

After my young-self was reprimanded, she lowered her head and looked sad.

「But, you know...I just wanted to show this to you mother... 」

「What is that? 」

「A doll...Tiana made it for you. 」

When the Queen was about to receive the doll, she noticed that Princess Tiana's hands were full of bruises.

「You injured yourself too much. You're clumsy, so don't push yourself too hard. 」

「Because, mother, you're so busy with work that we can't see each other that often. 」

And then, Princess Tiana showed her a big smile.

「So, think of this doll as me and have it to yourself! 」

The little Princess Tiana moved the limbs of the handmade doll and showed it to her mother.

「See! Now we can be together all the time! Even if you're away, Tiana will always be with mother! 」

「Oh my. The ideas that my little girl comes up with... 」

After receiving the doll, the Queen stroked my young-self's head and smiled dearly.

「Thank you. I will treasure it. 」

—

...Then, the black and white scene disappeared from my eyesight and a huge body like a mountain stood in from of me. It was the Grand Lion. That monster stared wickedly at the Queen, whom I held with my arms.

「Are you so sad that I destroyed your dead daughter's personal belongings? Jeez, I can't really understand the meaning of human feelings.」

The Grand Lion approached the Queen, grabbed her hair and brought his fierce lion face next to hers.

「But...this was perfect! I wanted to see your miserable face! Everyone died! They died for real! Your daughter, the King, your vassals and the townspeople! Everyone that was important to you has died! Listen, old hag! There is no hope for this world!」

When he released his hand from her hair, the Queen fell abruptly.

「I feel like I've waited too long for this moment. With this, Tarmine will be completely domineered by the beast men...」

The Grand Lion spoke happily.

「I'm going to cut your head at the execution ground. 」

...He...He's kidding, right!?

「Glu...Glu, glu, glu! 」

I couldn't stand anymore. I stood in front of the Grand Lion and tried to stop him from going to the execution ground. Nevertheless, the Grand Lion approached me and put his hand on my shoulder.

「Yeah. I didn't forget the words I told ya'. You did it. First, you devoted yourself on opening this old hag's heart. Second. Because of that, we were able to get this old hag's weakness. I praise you for that. I'll put you in the royal palace as I promised you.」

...Wro...Wrong! I didn't mean to...!

The Grand Lion took his hand of me and moved his hand aggressively. I thought he was going to attack me. The fish, whose earth snake changed inside of my body, appeared from below my legs and stripped its fangs. Nonetheless, the Grand Lion just laughed aloud.

「I'll give your reward later. Now the execution of this old hag comes first. 」

As soon as he declared those words, he forcibly grabbed the Queen's arms and dragged her towards the door. The fish that Seiya left with me would only attack others automatically if my life were in danger. When it sensed that the Grand Lion did not intend to harm me, it returned to my body.

...This...This can't be happening! The Queen will definitely be killed by this rate! I had to stop the Grand Lion!

I rushed to the door and tried to chase him. I looked down on the long spiral staircase, but I couldn't see the stature of the Grand Lion anymore.

...No way!! How did he get down so fast from this long staircase!?

I became so nervous that I rushed down the spiral staircase without hesitating. I was too impatient. So, while I went down, my legs got entangled with one another that I even rolled down through the stairs.

Ugh! What was wrong with me! Why was this happening at such a time! It has been only one hour since I've met with Seiya! His sword dance was not even half-away through!

—

I left the tower in a hurry. And yet, I couldn't see the Grand Lion and the Queen anywhere.

...The execution ground! She was looking at that place from the window...So, the direction would be that way!

My intuition was right. Many of the beast people were talking aloud and moving quickly towards the direction I was headed to.

「I heard that they're about to start the Queen's execution. 」

「What? I didn't know that old woman was still alive. 」

Although I wanted to hurry, I couldn't move fast because there were many beast men walking in front of me.

「Glu, glu, glu! 」

The irritated beast men looked back when they heard my loud fish-man voice.

「Ah, what's up with this annoying fish-man? 」

「I'll eat you, bastard. 」

No matter how much they argued, or threatened me, I tried to pass through them and moved ahead without stopping.

I continued to walk recklessly among the crowd, until finally I could see the back of the Grand Lion. He had a henchman carry the Queen, while he walked calmly ahead.

...I...I felt relieved! I finally caught up with them!

Nonetheless, on that moment. My feet stopped.

What...What on earth was I doing!? I ran and caught up with them...Then, what was I supposed to do now!? Was I this stupid!? I won't be able to go against the power of the Grand Lion!!

Suddenly, I noticed a gravel floor under my feet. Crucifixion pillars were placed horizontally on the center of this wasteland. And a guillotine was placed on a different position. The Grand Lion had already arrived at the execution ground.

...I won't be able to do anything under these circumstances!! Seiya!!

At this point, I heard Seiya's spirited voice inside of my head.

『I'll give absolute priority to the Six-Hexagram plan over anything else. 』

I...I mustn't!! Was I going to be a hindrance to Seiya once again!? Absolutely not!! It would be completely useless to call for Seiya right now!! Besides, the Great Goddess Isister also warned us about this!! She said to avoid a direct confrontation with the Grand Lion!!

The feeling of remorse gradually transformed into anger.

All...All of this was my fault! The Grand Lion wouldn't have noticed it if I hadn't taken the doll from the sleeping Queen's hand! It was just like Seiya cautioned me! I shouldn't have involved myself personally with the Queen more than necessary! And now, it had become like this...!

Even if I regretted my actions so deeply, it was too late now. But, I couldn't stop regretting it. The end of my constant repentance lied on my reliable hero.

That...That's right...Maybe, if it were Seiya, he would be able to do something about this situation? Yes! I knew that fighting directly with the Grand Lion was dangerous! But, Seiya was extremely cautious! Perhaps, he would know how to save the Queen with a good but cautiousness plan...!?

『Se...Seiya won't be able to win. 』

Yet, this time it were Adenela's words that resonated on my mind. The Goddess of War, Zeth, taught Seiya the "crazy warrior" state...Even if Seiya transformed into that state, he wouldn't be able to reach the "Phase 2nd" because it was something impossible for humans to achieve. He wouldn't be able to defeat the Grand Lion in a direct fight. There was no point in asking Seiya for help this time. The success of the Six-Hexagram plan was absolutely necessary to defeat the Grand Lion and save Tarmine. In...In other words...

...I'm so sorry, Queen Carmilla...! Forgive me...! I won't be able to save you...!

The beast man dragged the Queen forcibly as if she were a mere luggage. And then, I saw the blade of the guillotine rising up. Blood was dripping from that terrible spot.

The Queen had a tiring expression of her face. She looked as if she gave up on everything. As if she lost the will to live. Such a contrast from her happy expression when she received that doll from my younger-self.

...Mother...!!

—

...I broke into the Cave Along immediately. When I came inside, an intense sound squeezed my ears violently. My eyes became blank for a brief moment. It was probably due to the difference in space and lightening as opposed to the surface.

Seiya, who was dancing with a sword, stopped moving instantaneously and struck the Platinum Sword on the ground.

「...Lista. Do you realize what you have done? 」

He snapped his finger and I transformed back to normal with the power of the art of change.

「All of the hard work I did in order to defeat the Grand Lion...all of that vanished on this precise moment.」

「Ah, you know...Right now...the Grand Lion is about to....execute the Queen... 」

Seiya remained silent. I didn't know what expression I should make, nor did I know what to say. I just began to smile pathetically and pitifully.

「Ah...Ahahah...I am a nuisance, right? How long do I need until I become a levelheaded person? "I am a goddess, and Seiya is a human"...I was determined to follow that rule, you know? Even so...I don't even know what to think or what to do anymore...」

I approached Seiya to seek salvation. I pressed my head against his chest.

「Just hate me. You can hit me and kick me whenever you want. But, please...I beg you...please, save the Queen.」

I wondered what nonsense I was mumbling about. Seiya won't be able to defeat the Grand Lion without the success of the Six-Hexagram plan. And yet, I wanted him to save the Queen. Even if I were a mere insect, I just wanted to save her. That's all I asked for.

However...However...

「Even if I don't remember anything...Even if I became a goddess...Even so, she was the only mother I ever had...!」

Tears fell from my eyes. I pled to the human hero for help as if I prayed to the gods.

「My mother...Please, save my mother...! Please...I beg you...! 」

After a minute of silence, Seiya opened his mouth.

「You are a goddess and I am the hero that you've summoned. We are no more and no less than this...You certainly said something similar back then in the heavenly world, am I right?」

My body trembled after hearing the sarcasm that echoed on the top of my head.

「I am sorry...! I am sorry...! 」

As soon as I apologized, Seiya grabbed my shoulder and threw me away.

crying sound

That was the "denial answer". Just as I separated away from Seiya's body, at the same time, I felt as if my soul also separated from my body. I was so sad that I couldn't stop crying.

However...I was wrong.

I heard a metallic sound. When I slowly raised my wet face full of tears, I noticed that he had the Platinum Sword on his waist.

「You are correct. 」

「Se...Seiya...!? 」

「There's nothing to neither like nor dislike. "Save the Queen"... If that's the will of the goddess who summoned me, then I will follow that will.」

The hero took a deep breath and pressed his fists.

「After all. If I can't beat this enemy with my ability alone, then I won't be able to save this world from bigger threats.」

On that occasion, he looked at me with eyes full of determination.

「Let's go, Lista. Let's save the Queen and defeat the Grand Lion. 」

Chapter 75: Beast Hazard (1)

After I stopped crying, Seiya asked me the following question.

「Is the situation imminent? 」

I wiped my tears on the sleeves of my dress. Then, I tried to speak even with a trembling voice.

「Mother...Queen Carmilla is at the guillotine platform...she is with the Grand Lion in the execution grounds...there are many beast men watching her execution...」

Seiya nodded quietly. Before long, he made me open a portal to lead directly to the execution grounds. He turned me into a fish-man once again.

「I will draw their attention. You'll have to rescue the Queen during that moment. 」

After checking the safety of our exit point, Seiya put his hand on the portal's door, and...

「State Berserk...! 」

On that instant, Seiya's body emitted a maddening red-black aura! His glossy black hair became red immediately! Moreover, demonic fangs came out from his mouth!

...He transformed into the Crazy Warrior so suddenly! I thought that he would transform into a dog beast man to blend in on the crowd at the execution ground!

Seiya went through the portal and disappeared instantly. I chased after him in a hurry. After passing through the portal, I looked at my surroundings.

The execution ground was about ten meters away from where I stood. In the distance, I could see a mountain of beast people and the figure of the Queen near the guillotine.

The hero, who should've been extremely cautious, put his sword on his shoulder and marched towards the large crowd.

Soon, most of the beast people on the execution ground noticed that Seiya was approaching them.

「...Ah? Who's that? 」

The beast men took their eyes from the Queen, who was about to be beheaded on the guillotine, and looked attentively at Seiya.

「Is that...a human? 」

「Where did he come from? 」

On that moment! A red “lightening” passed between the beast men at an astonishing speed! It was as if the trajectory was “sewing” each individual! The beast men looked confused after witnessing what had just happened! However! After Seiya passed through, the beast men’s upper bodies were separated from their lower bodies! The beast men were cut in half!

After moment of silence...

agonizing screams

The beast men screamed incessantly! Those same beast men, who screamed madly, died shortly afterwards and fell to the ground! Exactly, he was literally a Crazy Warrior! He took all of the beast men in front of him with just one sword swing and attacked them without mercy!

The Queen’s execution was no longer the focus of their attention. The crowd of beast people went in a pandemonium after a sudden enemy appeared. The execution ground went into chaos. The beast men in charge of killing the Queen with the guillotine quickly fled from that place.

Now it was my chance. I behaved exactly like a fish-man and I approached the Queen.

When the Queen looked at me, she murmured as if she regained her sanity.

「Yo...You...? Did you come to help me...? 」

「Glu! 」

I evacuated the Queen to a safe place away from the guillotine. Even if the other beast men saw me like this, it could be interpreted as a guard preventing the Queen from running away.

We came to a place where there were no beast people around us. On that moment, the Queen finally turned her eyes at Seiya, who sliced the beast people like a mad demon. She opened her eyes wide and her body started to quiver.

「Is that...the hero? Yes...That’s right! So, he was alive...! 」

I nodded positively with an expression full of hope.

...I was able to rescue the Queen thanks to Seiya! The best thing to do now would be to take the Queen with us and leave this place immediately! However...

At this point. I heard the sound of a giant stepping the pebbles furiously.

「...It’s a bit rude to create a rampage in my own garden. 」

Seiya was surrounded by a large amount of beasts man corpses...Behind him stood the Grand Lion, who was staring at him with devilish eyes.

「I see that dozens of beasts, including elite beasts from my fighting units, were killed in an instant...What a considerable deal you created here, human.」

His henchmen were slaughtered mercilessly. Yet, he was not upset. He remained calm. That was really the ruthless and vicious demeanor of the true Beast Emperor.

I reaffirmed the status of the Grand Lion by activating my clairvoyance ability.

Beast Emperor the Grand Lion

Level – 99 (MAX)

HP – 1200044

MP – 0

Attack – 856121

Defense – 819637

Agility – 807711

Magic – 58754

Potential – 999 (MAX)

Resistance – Fire, Water, Wind, Lightening, Ice, Earth, Light, Darkness, Poison, Paralysis, Curse, Instant Death, Sleep, Abnormal Condition

Special skills – Evil God Protection (Lvl MAX)

Skills – Jet Black Nail

Personality – Villainous

I shuddered again when I saw the Grand Lion's ability value. His status was comparable to that of the high-ranking gods from the God's realm.

The State Berserk could double Seiya's status. In other words, Seiya's agility must be at 500,000 points. The Grand Lion's agility value even exceeded the points of Bell Bubu's flight skill, the demon we defeated in Geabrande capable of moving at a super-high speed. Even so, the Grand Lion's agility was still higher than Seiya's doubled agility value. The difference was about...300,000 points!

...It was likely that the Grand Lion's max speed would easily intersect Seiya's actions! There's no way that we could easily escape from this place! What should we do!?

Anyways, I secretly activated my goddess' power. I improved my dynamic vision so that I could follow Seiya and the Grand Lion's movements with accuracy.

「A human with such power was still hiding in the Radral continent...No, that wouldn't be possible. Are you, perhaps, the summoned hero?」

The Grand Lion uttered an unsatisfyingly voice when Seiya, who didn't lose his offensive battle stance, didn't respond to his question.

「Hey, hey. Don't be like that. I'm just talking to you. Are you the hero who was summoned to save this word? Am I correct?」

Seiya slowly opened his mouth.

「...That's right. 」

「Then, does that mean that you defeated Bunogeos? So, it was you whom I talked to back in the town of Galvano...Jeez. It was just as the god with mottled hair warned me about.」

After looking slightly frustrated, the Grand Lion laughed happily for no special reason.

「Even so, it was rather brilliant of you. Your plan was successful. In my perspective, you've accomplished a big deal.」

「It was thanks to the power of the art of change that I've learnt in the heavenly world. No one can see my real appearance neither my presence nor my aura.」

「I see, is that so. It was simple as that. 」

The Grand Lion laughed aloud. Afterwards, he crossed his arms as if he had no intention of fighting.

「I really like strong guys. Do you want to cooperate with me to kill the Demon King Artemaeus? You and I have a common interest, am I right? What do you think?」

Wha...What's that!! Was he serious!? No...No, there's no such thing!! Still, maybe we could escape if Seiya pretended to accept his invitation....!?

I was distracted by the enemy's words of a seemingly peaceful invitation. But, on the next moment, I realized that the Grand Lion was no longer on his spot! The Grand Lion moved at an astonishing speed and rapidly approached Seiya! He raised his right arm with a killing intent!

「...Jet Black Nail! 」

He groaned with a lower-pitched voice and aimed at the Seiya simultaneously! The Chain Destruction was embedded on the Jet Black Nail too! A tremendous roar and subsequent vibration shook all the area of the execution ground!

...Seiya!!

The ground was torn apart by the impact of the Grand Lion's fearsome attack. Nonetheless... I didn't see Seiya on the area where the big and large-shaped claw had struck.

On that very moment, a metallic sound resonated intensely! Seiya stood behind the Grand Lion! I noticed that the Grand Lion managed to shield himself from Seiya's sword attack with one of his long nails!

「Oh...You managed to avoid my attack and even tried to strike me from behind my back.」

He...He dodged it!? And even tried to counterattack!? How!? His status was clearly lower than the status of the Grand Lion...

I was amazed to see how quickly Seiya reacted to that attack.

The amount of madness from the red-black aura that covered his body began to increase! Not only his hair transformed into a fury of red hair! His eyes became red as well!

...That...That change was...!! Yes, there's no doubt!! He raised his State Berserk into Phase 2nd!!

The normal cycle of the Berserk mode transformed the ability value x2! Then, the Phase 2nd would transform the ability value x3! Summing up, right now, Seiya's offensive power was slightly above than the Grand Lion's power!

I trembled with excitement.

That's right! Until now, this hero had repeatedly acquired special techniques, which were said to be impossible to achieve by mere humans! He even managed to learn the arrow skills, the consecutive gunshot sword, and even the destruction technique! No wonder that he was able to fully activate the Phase 2nd!

Nevertheless. I noticed a further change in Seiya's appearance.

The color of Seiya's eyes returned back to its normal state. Besides, the amount of aura that started to increase not too long ago, suddenly stopped surging, and its growth fell back to normal.

...Eh!? What happened...!?

「What a fluke. Maybe next time. Here I go. 」

The Grand Lion approached Seiya and tried to strike him with his right arm. On that moment, the color of Seiya's eyes changed again. And, he dodged that frightening strike. However, this time, the Grand Lion chased after Seiya immediately when he dodged the attack. The enemy twisted his body and tried to kill Seiya with his left-handed claws.

Nevertheless, Seiya reacted quickly. He bent his upper body instantaneously and dodged the second strike. The Jet Black Nail cut a small string of Seiya's hair that fell to the ground. But, that proved to be a very dangerous situation, therefore, Seiya took some distance away from him and stood at a seemingly bling spot.

「...You changed again. So, it wasn't a fluke after all. 」

The Grand Lion was surprised. However, I noticed a certain fact when I was stared closely at the Seiya.

...The...The color of his eyes returned back to normal...! Whoa! Seiya...Seiya...hasn't mastered the Phase 2nd! I was sure that it only could be activated momentarily!

He could only raise his mode to Phase 2nd when the Grand Lion attacked him! He had to return back to normal straightaway after dodging his attacks! He probably didn't have much time to withstand the Phase 2nd!

My breathing became disturbed after knowing the truth. Even so, we still had a chance of winning this fight if the Grand Lion didn't notice this.

However, the monster, who tried to defy reason in order to defeat the Demon King Artemaeus, greatly distorted his mouth. He grinned wickedly at Seiya.

「I can't see your status because of the camouflage skill, you bastard. But, I can see the increase and decrease of your aura. Did you rapidly increase your ability value the moment I attacked you? After that, your aura decreased considerably. In other words, you bastard can only surpass my status for only a short moment...」

Then, the Grand Lion swayed his hands in a circle as if he were preparing for a different type of offensive strike.

「From now on, I'll attack you with sequences of Jet Black Nail! Prepare yourself, bastard! 」

This...was bad!! This was extremely bad!! He figured it out!! Seiya, what are you going to do!? He won't be able to use special skills nor the magical attributes of fire and earth while his Berserk mode was activated!! Could we escape from this place if he released his Berserk mode to get his magical powers back!? But...But, he would be killed instantly if his ability value returned back to normal!!

How can we win this fight...!!

Chapter 75: Beast Hazard (2)

The Grand Lion approached Seiya with astonishing speed! I didn't even have the time to settle down my own thoughts! He confronted Seiya with a series of Jet Black Nail attacks! Seiya managed to deflect the attacks with the activation of Phase 2nd! He defended himself with his sword...However, the color of Seiya's eyes and his aura disappeared before long!

The Beast Emperor grinned wickedly.

「...Die. 」

Yet, the body of the Grand Lion bounced abruptly. The Grand Lion's claws only cut through the air. At that moment, Seiya managed to step back and stood at a safe distance away from the Grand Lion.

「What? 」

An earth snake was entangled on one of the Grand Lion's legs. He tried to get it away 「Chi. 」 . After noticing the earth snake, he easily cut it off with a nail as if he wiped some dust effortlessly. The remains of the earth snake fell to the ground and transformed back into sand.

「What a cheap trick. 」

The Grand Lion stared at Seiya with revulsion. But, on that instant, Seiya's foot hit the ground. Soon, more than ten earth snakes appeared from the ground.

...Earth Magic!! How!? He couldn't use any magical properties while on Berserk mode!!

However, I realized it when numerous earth snakes gathered around Seiya to protect him.

I see! Those were the fishes that were on my body and returned back to Seiya when he ordered them to! They dissolved their forms and transformed into earth snakes again!

「It will be futile no matter how much of them you have to protect yourself. It will be a matter of just scratching them off.」

The Grand Lion jumped towards Seiya's direction! His speed was so great that the earth snakes around Seiya's feet didn't have time to react! Seiya manifested his Phase 2nd on that moment and dodged the attack! After that, he tried to use his Platinum Sword to fight back...

「Oops. That's dangerous. 」

The enemy defended himself with the Jet Black Nail...However, Seiya's eye color returned back to normal! The Grand Lion tried to grab that opportunity to kill Seiya, but the earth snakes jumped all at once to the Grand Lion to save their master's life!

「How annoying, you bastard! 」

The Jet Black Nail cut more than ten earth snakes into pieces! Their remains fell to the ground and they became sand again! Then, the Grand Lion went straight to Seiya!

...All of the earth snakes were killed!! Seiya!!

Nevertheless, the Grand Lion couldn't move any further and roared furiously.

「There are still some left...! 」

When I looked closely at Seiya's feet, I noticed that earth snakes were raising from the ground once again! Their number was...

Thirty...Fifty...No...they were more than a hundred snakes!! But, how!?

A horde of earth snakes attacked the Grand Lion from all directions.

Seiya spoke in a simple and plain tone.

「I was planning to fight you anyways. Therefore, I created several earth snakes beforehand and scattered them around Tarmine. Now, I've called them here.」

I...I see...!! But, even so, when did he manage to create this many!? Seiya had been preparing and looking forward to the success of the Six-Hexagram plan until now!! And yet, he still had time to create this insane amount of earth snakes!? He was awfully cautious after all!!

However, the situation was complicated. Even if they were that many, they wouldn't be able to defeat the Grand Lion. The Jet Black Nail attacks destroyed the snakes one after another, changing them back to sand.

Seiya activated the Phase 2nd. He tried to strike the Grand Lion, but the enemy didn't back down. Seiya took his distance once again. At the same time, the Grand Lion chased after Seiya while dealing with the earth snakes. Twenty, thirty...the enemy kept destroying masses of earth snakes. Each time my heart beat faster.

「...What's up? Is it over? 」

After the Grand Lion professed those words, I noticed that the earth snakes stopped ascending from the area under Seiya's feet.

The eyes of the Grand Lion looked sharp as if he were sure of his own victory...Suddenly, he made a bold move against Seiya!

Seiya activated the Phase 2nd immediately! He dodged the blow and, next, he dodged the Nail attack! Afterwards, Seiya aimed towards the Grand Lion's heart but the enemy avoided his offensive strike! And then...the Grand Lion made a third attempt to attack Seiya!

...Phase 2nd was about to be deactivated soon!! He was going...to die!!

Nonetheless, it was unbelievable! The color of Seiya's eyes while confronting the Grand Lion were still red! Seiya defended himself from the fearsome nails by using his sword as a shield! He successfully deflected the attack and the enemy's body bounced back! Then, he moved the Platinum Sword at an overwhelming speed that almost got the Grand Lion's nose! This time, on the contrary, the Grand Lion moved away from Seiya and took a safe distance.

...He still had the power to keep the Phase 2nd activated!? How!?

Like me, the Grand Lion looked as if he didn't understand it either. He showed a confusing expression then.

「Hey, hey. What kind of logic is that? Did you make it on purpose to look as if you could only do it for a short time to fool me? No...My judgement was correct. Until a moment ago, I saw clearly that you tried your hardest to keep your powers up.」

Seiya twisted his neck and spoke aloud.

「The continuous activation of the Phase 2nd puts a heavy burden on my mind and body. There was a percentage of danger, which indicated that my mind and body could collapse. Therefore, I was adjusting the power little by little while I drove myself into a battle with you...Okay.」

Seiya emitted a huge aura out of his body and turned his red eyes towards the Grand Lion.

「...Accustom Mode. 」

I was perplexed when I heard the hero speak the similar quote that the Geabrande's Emperor used to declare.

...A...A genius! Seiya stabilized the powers of the State Berserk Phase 2nd in the midst of the actual battle against the Grand Lion!

「Okay then. Let's go with all my might. 」

Seiya pulled from his sheath a second Platinum Sword. He took a double sword offensive stance; one pointed above, while the other facing below.

「You don't give up...! You bastard...! 」

The moment the enemy finished talking...! Bang! Both of them roared extremely high and clashed with each other!

Seiya's attack was not the usual Double Consecutive Gunshot Sword. It was no special skill. The attack was just a normal double-handed sword that he aimed directly towards the Grand Lion. But, its power and speed were tremendous! It felt as if the earth and heaven were tearing apart with just the power of one strike! The shock from the clash between the swords and the nails made my hair shake away!

With Seiya's outstanding strength, the Grand Lion couldn't defend himself in time! His cheeks were cut and black blood dripped from his face! His blackish armor cracked up as well! The Grand Lion was slightly underpowered!

...A...Amazing!! Seiya was really one in a hundred million people!! A special and talented human being!! He could win this!! Yes, even without the secret of the Six-Hexagram!!

However, a dark shadow crossed through my mind and swallowed up my tiny hope.

...Wait a second! Why did Adenela say that Seiya wouldn't be able to win against the Grand Lion? Not only her. Why did the Great Goddess Isister say to avoid a direct combat with the enemy?

And then...My anxiety became a reality.

Before I noticed, a strange scene developed right in front of my eyes. Seiya's expression, who was supposed to have an upper hand, seemed distressful, while the Grand Lion, who was underpowered, had a relaxed expression.

「What's this? Blood? So, you managed to cut me, huh. You are a vicious bastard. You really thought you could win this fight? And here I was, trying to kill you without getting serious...」

...What!? The...The Grand Lion's true power was hidden...!!

The Grand Lion spoke with a relaxed tone against a rough-breathing and exhausted Seiya.

「My intuition was right. You can inflict damage if I'm not careful enough. That's why I have no choice but to get serious. Unlike Bunogeos, I activate my powers automatically. I just needed to fight against a certain enemy to resort to this. No matter how cautious you are, this will be your demise.」

For moments, Seiya tried to attack him. However, the Grand Lion mocked Seiya's movements.

「It's too late, hero. 」

Then, the body of the Grand Lion was wrapped in black light.

「"Beast Hazard" ...! 」

Seiya was almost thrown away by the overwhelming power of the black aura that spread on the enemy's body! When the insane aura stopped glittering, the body of the Grand Lion became deformed! He had huge wings on his back that resembled bat wings! Below his waist, a tail of a large snake moved creepily as if it had freewill! He transformed into a Chimera! The deformed body radiated a pale light as if it were charging up! That thing was ready to charge at Seiya!

I felt a shivering throughout my body as if my life was in eminent danger. And I wasn't even close to the battle ground...

「...Vault! 」

A pale flash like a lightning bolt instantly passed through Seiya!

In the blink of an eye, Seiya and the Grand Lion seemed to have switched positions.

...Seiya got on his knees.

Seiya remained strong even when the Warlord Emperor cut off his arm. And yet, right now, my hero fell on his knees, while he held his stomach with a distorted and painful expression on his face.

Chapter 76: The Forbidden Exceeded Limit

The Beast Emperor was looking down at Seiya, who was suffering tremendously on the ground.

「My attacking power has exceeded the 1,000,000 point mark. I have greatly surpassed the power of the Demon King Artemaeus.」

I activated the clairvoyance ability. Before long, the new status of the Grand Lion reflected on my eyes.

Beast Emperor the Grand Lion

State – Thunder Beast

Level – 99 (MAX)

HP – 955989 / 1200044

MP – 0

Attack – 1023987

Defense – 998596

Agility – 938855

Magic – 58754

Potential – 999 (MAX)

Resistance – Fire, Water, Wind, Lightening, Ice, Earth, Light, Darkness, Poison, Paralysis, Curse, Instant Death, Sleep, Abnormal Condition

Special skills – Evil God Protection (Lv MAX), Flight (Lv MAX)

Skills – Jet Black Nail, Volt, Volt Sky Axel

Personality – Villainous

...“Despair” was a meaningless word to describe my feelings. I felt something much worse than just despair. This world was no longer comparable to Geabrande. There was no human being capable of defeating such an absurd monster.

On this moment.

「Yo...You...? 」

Right by my side, Queen Carmilla pointed at me with her trembling hand.

And then...I noticed. I had no longer a fish-man's appearance!

「What are you...! 」

I tried to suppress my anguish. Therefore, I only told the Queen what was important to hear.

「I...I am Listarte. I am the goddess who came to save this world. I've been disguised as a fish-man until now.」

「I see. That explains everything... 」

The Queen looked at me with a stunned expression on her face.

「Are you...the Goddess of Fishes...? 」

「No!! I'm not a Goddess of Fishes!! A...Anyways!! I'll tell you more about it later!! 」

At that point, my gaze turned away towards the place of battle. I noticed that something went definitely wrong.

...Ho...How...Why did the art of change deactivate right now!?

Earth Magic used the power of nature as well...For example, Earth Magic had the capability of using, not only the magical energy from the caster, but also from the soil itself. That was the reason why the earth snakes could move without relying too much on Seiya's power. However, the power of the art of change could only be deactivated by 100% of Seiya's power. But the fact, was that the art of change had been completely disengaged...

...It meant that Seiya received real damage!!

Seiya was holding his stomach with his hands and he was breathing extremely hard. That fearsome attack did hurt Seiya badly. Red blood was falling constantly from his torn abdomen.

「Seiya!! 」

I wanted to cure him...

「...Don't come here. 」

Seiya sensed my movements and uttered a painful voice. At the same time, the Grand Lion turned his eyes on my direction.

「Who the hell is that woman...? Ah...Is that the goddess of a different dimension that brought the hero to this world?」

Then, the Grand Lion spoke about me as if he wasn't that interested.

「I'll kill her alongside that old hag. But, before I do that, I'll kill you first, bastard. 」

The Grand Lion used Volt to go up against Seiya. Somehow, Seiya raised his body, held his sword and defended the attack.

「I absolutely hate the repulsive humans. The Demon King made me like this when he transformed this world into his own home. I wonder if you detestable humans killed me brutally on my previous life.」

After he finished talking...! In an instant a lightning bolt passed through Seiya! At the same time, I heard the sound of flesh being torn apart!

The speed of the Grand Lion even created a dirt smoke of his trajectory. He stopped at a distant place. Seiya couldn't defend himself from the Volt attack. His left cheek was sliced as if it had been cut with a knife.

The Grand Lion licked Seiya's red blood that fell from his nails! And then, he took the Volt offensive stance once again! Before long...a pale lightning bolt sprinted all over again!

This time, I heard a violent metallic sound. Somehow, Seiya managed to defend himself. However, the Platinum Sword he had on his left hand went flying in the air.

Seiya rushed in a hurry to the area where the Platinum Sword fell on the ground. But, the Grand Lion was already standing in front of the Platinum Sword. Yet, Seiya still tried to grab the fallen Platinum Sword, but his arms were unprotected. Therefore, the Grand Lion tried to get this opportunity by dissecting Seiya's arms with his nails...But, on that instant, the enemy stopped the attack against the hero.

「...Did you really think I wouldn't notice it? 」

The leg of the Grand Lion slammed into Seiya's abdomen violently. Seiya's body floated in the air with a dull sound. Seiya collapsed on the ground and bled brutally from the wound inflicted on his stomach.

「I've been aware of it since I met you bastard. Your left arm is wrapped by a strange aura. 」

I took a deep breath when I heard the Grand Lion's words.

Pe...Perhaps it was the aura of the destruction technique that Seiya used once before on the fight against the Warlord Emperor!? Was it "Counter Break"!? Did he manage to trigger that skill on time before activating his Berserk model!? Did he really anticipate the difficulty of this situation!? He wanted to sever the Grand Lion's arms in exchange for his own arms to bet on a turnaround...

「Is that your last trump card? What a shame. 」

Unfortunately, the monster discovered the strategy of the cautious hero. The Grand Lion continued to kick cruelly Seiya's abdomen while laughing maniacally.

「You must regret for wanting to face me directly! I'll kill you bastard! And, I'll kill Artemaeus! Then, I'll put every human and monster under my rule, the true Beast Emperor!」

He was kicked. He was stepped on aggressively...Tears overflow from my eyes when I saw my hero being beaten so cruelly as if he were a sandbag.

...This outstanding talent...This genius...was getting beaten up so miserably...! He could've won this battle with the success of the Six-Hexagram plan...! But, this...! This was my entirely fault...! (EN: No shit sherlock)

The Grand Lion pulled his leg backwards and, with a strong swing, he kicked Seiya so severely that he was blown away by a few meters from where he was standing.

「Seiya!! 」

I couldn't stand to watch this anymore. I didn't care if the enemy tried to kill me. I just ran quickly on Seiya's direction.

I put my hands on Seiya's abdomen and tried to invoke my healing magic...

「...I don't need to be cured. 」

Seiya spoke to me in a painful tone.

Maybe he realized that he won't be able to win even if I cured him? No...He might not even want to borrow my healing powers. After all, it was my fault that he had to suffer this much.

「I am sorry...! I am...truly sorry...! 」

I could only regret and apologize. Seiya stared at me with his usual boring and expressionless face.

「Lista...Your judgement was correct. Lives of precious people would've been lost if I got too obsessed with the success of the Six-Hexagram strategy...」

Even deeply hurt, my hero spoke gentle words to console the disheartened me. It seemed that those words were the last words of my hero.

However. Seiya used the Platinum Sword as a cane and stood up.

「This severe pain...helps me from submerging into madness...Maybe...it's possible to express it now.」

...Possible...Express...?

Was he holding back his real power? I realized it when I heard Seiya's determination voice!

...He intended to activate his State Berserk Phase 3rd!! His status would increase 4x with the activation of Phase 3rd!! He would definitely overcome the strength of the Grand Lion!! That was probably the only way to win against the frightening power of the Grand Lion! But...Even so...!!

『There are "boundaries that cannot be crossed" by a human being. If a human reaches the Phase 3rd, he will cease to be a human being forever! The Berserk mode scars will be engraved in the soul, and even if you return to your original world, the after effects will certainly remain within you!』

The warning of the Goddess of War, Zeth, crossed through my mind! I had a very bad feeling about this! Not even the talent nor strong spirit would be able to suppress the insane madness of that crazy power...I felt an ominous feeling!

The Grand Lion was watching Seiya and me at a remotely position...

「Have you finished saying goodbye? Well, don't worry. I'll kill you too after I've finished with that bastard.」

The Grand Lion laughed with a devilish smile.

「No...Actually, I'll kill you first. 」

And then, he looked viciously at me...

「Volt! 」

A pale lightning bolt went straight to me! I instinctively closed my eyes when I knew that my death was near! Nonetheless, I heard a strong sound as if something hit violently!

I opened my eyes slowly...and I saw something unbelievable.

The Grand Lion ducked down in one knee! Black blood dripped from his mouth, passed through his jaw and fell to the ground!

「Bastard...! 」

The hero stood in front of the Grand Lion. Likewise, the Grand Lion looked at the hero with rage. I also stared at Seiya with an astonishing look on my face.

The amount of aura was incomparable to his previous aura! In addition, his skin color increased in redness, and his fingernails changed to a color between red and black!

The hero spoke with a rough breath.

「Somehow...I managed to express it successfully... 」

「It...It can't be...Is that the Phase 3rd!? 」

However, Seiya shook his head.

「Hypothetically speaking...even if I defeat the Grand Lion...there is still the Demon King ahead of this...now it's not the right time to bet on something dangerous...」

「The...Then, what is that change!? 」

「It is a limit that cannot be exceeded by any means...so, I have no need to exceed it now. I just...had to get close to that limit instead...」

Seiya uttered the following words.

「State Berserk...Phase 2.5... 」

...Phase 2.5!! Normally, the ability value would increase by 3x with Phase 2nd!! If he activated Phase 2.5, then...it increased by 3.5x!! By adjusting the Phase 2nd with Phase 3rd, did his strength aligned with the power of the Grand Lion!?

「No...well...to be precise...it is Phase 2.491... 」

This...This was extremely surreal!! No...It was amazing!! He even adjusted his activation by three decimal places!!

The Grand Lion spit the blood from his mouth to the ground.

「Is that your real trump card, bastard? That's irrelevant. I'll just need to crush it entirely. 」

After saying those words, the Grand Lion charged against Seiya by using Volt! Nevertheless, Seiya, who was wrapped in red-black madness aura, also rushed in the Grand Lion's direction! The two of them collided with one another!

After a terrible roar, I noticed that the Grand Lion went against Seiya's double-handed swords with the Jet Black Nail. What a fearsome scene! The Grand Lion managed to block Seiya's attack, and started to laugh maniacally! However! The body of the Grand Lion was gradually pushed down by the overwhelming power of Seiya's newly awakening state!

「What the hell is this power...! But, you're just a mere human being...! 」

「I've stopped being a human for now. 」

「Don't screw with me...! Who do you think I am! 」

The Grand Lion was outraged! He shook his arms fiercely! With the strength of the Jet Black Nail, the Grand Lion crushed the bottom of the Platinum Sword on Seiya's right hand!

「It seems that your power doesn't match with the durability of your weapons. 」

Just as the Grand Lion professed, the Platinum Swords were powerful weapons. However, these weapons were not on par with the fearsome strength of enemies from the Demon King class. In addition, the swords were gradually cracking from the fierce confrontation of the previous fight.

...Oh no!! Why did this happen right after Seiya finally reached the enemy's power!!

I was deeply discouraged...Nonetheless! Seiya's feet uplifted immediately! Moreover! A new earth snake appeared from the ground and took one of Seiya's sheath!

「An earth snake!? You still had one!? 」

「Yeah. This is a spare earth snake. And that's a spare Platinum Sword. 」

When he received the sheath from the earth snake, he redrew that sword...

「The left sword is also damaged. I have to replace it just in case. 」

He slightly uplifted his foot from the ground! And then! A new earth snake appeared with a different sheath!

「This is the spare of the spare earth snake. And that's a spare of the spare Platinum Sword.」

...He...He had lots of spares...!!

I was completely appalled by the extremely well-prepared hero. On that moment, Seiya equipped himself with his newly double-handed swords. The Grand Lion gritted his teeth in fury.

「Don't screw with me, bastard...Are you a magician... 」

The Grand Lion slowly drew an arc with his arms.

「I won't forgive you...! I'm gonna shatter the shit out of you with the Jet Black Nail powered by Volt's energy...!」

On the other hand, Seiya exhaled a long and deep sigh 「huh 」 . And then, he muttered the following.

「State Berserk...Phase 2.6...! 」

...He was getting close to Phase 3rd again!! Was he going to be okay!? How long could he endure the continuing pressure of madness...!!

However, I noticed something irregular from the enemy's side. The Grand Lion continued to grit his teeth and his breath was rough as if he were exhausted or in pain.

I see!! Not even the Grand Lion could keep with his Beast Hazard state for too long!! In...In other words...Whichever wins or loses...This battle will be settled soon!!

...Before my eyes. A red-black aura of madness and a devilish pale aura were facing each other for the ultimate combat.

The hero slowly moved the tip of the double-handed swords against the Grand Lion.

「I'll free the Radral continent from the control of the beast men. 」

「Don't get cocky...you measly human...! 」

Then, the Grand Lion roared furiously.

「Humans are toys!! Humans are food!! This land!! Radral belongs to the beast men!! 」

「That will end today. 」

「How dare you...!! 」

The enemy used the power of Volt to increase the strength of Jet Black Nail attack! And then! The enemy tried to rip Seiya apart! Seiya's swords blocked the first attack! But, the enemy didn't give up! He continued to strike without stopping! Even so, Seiya's double-handed swords deflected all those attacks!

However...I heard a sudden cracking sound! Before I knew it, Seiya's right-handed Platinum Sword shattered into pieces as if it were made of glass!

The Grand Lion grinned wickedly. Yet, black blood spilled from his cheek! Even though the right-handed sword was broken, Seiya managed to cut the Grand Lion's cheek by stabbing with his left-handed sword! The Beast Emperor groaned with hatred.

The Grand Lion continued his fierce attack in order to kill Seiya. The situation was unfavorable for Seiya because he only had one sword left. However, Seiya raised his feet again, and an earth snake gave him a new sheath. Seiya's upper body managed to avoid the attack coming from the Grand Lion. On this very moment, Seiya touched the sheath with his foot and kicked it to the sky. The sheath rotated in the air, and the sword came out from that sheath because of the centrifugal force...then, Seiya grabbed the sword with his free hand.

「...Another spare of the spare of the spare. 」

This time, Seiya took an offensive stance! He won't be able to use skills while the Berserk mode was active. But, he was a very unique and talented human...He used normal sword attacks, however! He attacked, he cut, he slashed, he pierced and he stabbed! He used all of different sword techniques on the enemy! Unable to avoid Seiya's sword attacks, the body of the Grand Lion became incised by deep lacerations!

「Damn...You...! 」

One of the swords broke again during the middle of Seiya's attacks. Still, an earth snake immediately offered a spare from the soil to Seiya. He didn't even look at it with his eyes. He kicked the sword to lift it up on the air and grabbed it immediately.

A relentlessly long-lasting battle. But then, suddenly, the Grand Lion used a different attack from his three-continuous strikes to kill Seiya at above his head..."The Snake's Tail"! The attack was coming from a blind spot that was difficult for a normal human being to notice! However, Seiya saw through that hidden attack and used his sword to counterattack it!

...In...Incredible...!! Seiya was completely overpowering the Grand Lion...!!

And then, I heard a fierce metallic sound on my ears. But, this time, it wasn't the Platinum Sword that broke. When I looked closely at that scene, I realized that it were the nails of the Grand Lion that broke!

「My...My nails...! 」

In the end, the Grand Lion's nails were getting more and more tattered. As opposed to Seiya's Platinum Swords, because he kept exchanging the damaged ones with newer ones. The Grand Lion took a distance away from Seiya.

The Grand Lion, who was stripped of his nails, wouldn't be able to perform the Jet Black Nail attack efficiently from now on. He stared at Seiya with anger.

「I am the one who'll exceed Artemaeus' power...! There's no way that I'll be undermined by this fight...! You bastard shouldn't be on this world in the first place...!」

Grand Lion spread its black wings and flew away into the sky. I rushed in Seiya's direction.

「Is...Is he running away!? 」

「No...He isn't. 」

The Grand Lion, who had stopped far away in the sky, roared so high that his voice reached the surface. The air around us vibrated because of his insane scream. Before long, his whole body increased in volume.

「What on earth is he doing? 」

「He is going to do something to kill me...As I can see, he is going to concentrate on all of the power he has now, and he'll try to give his ultimate blast.」

Seiya put his swords back in the sheaths as if he gave up.

「Se...Seiya!? 」

「I can't use magic nor special skills during State Berserk. I already prepared for that shortcoming. It takes a long time to concentrate, but this is the right moment to use it since I'm up against a great opponent.」

「But, how can you attack if you put your swords back into the sheaths!? 」

「I'm gradually remembering the destruction techniques. The Destruction Operation Method the Seventh..."Break Permission"...This technique, which allows the destruction energy to influence only on the natural objects, can turn the soil of earth magic into explosives.」

Seiya stepped his foot three times on the ground. The earth snake came out with a sheath wrapped in a strange cloth.

「This is a specially crafted sword. If I pull out this special Platinum Sword from its sheath, it will ignite the power of the soil destruction because of a frictional force. It will be able to create a greater power when combined with flames. And then, I can use it after it gets that enormous amount of energy.」

When Seiya finished talking, something happened in the sky. The Grand Lion, who was watching us silently from above, emanated a huge energy discharge. Soon after, that same energy returned back to the Grand Lion's body. Suddenly, the enemy's body became wrapped in a dazzling light.

「Die...! "Volt Sky Axel" ...! 」

The whole body created a terrifying aura so big that it covered the sky! He threw that insane aura towards the ground! It went flying down at an astonishing speed! It resembled a huge comet engulfed in a pale flashing light! There would be impossible for us to defend ourselves from that huge aura!

「Seiya!! Hurry up and use your sword!! 」

「I refuse. I'll use it until the very last minute. 」

「But...But, we'll die at this rate!! 」

「This is my last trump card. I won't have another chance if I don't do this correctly.」

The ultimate attack from the Grand Lion approached the ground at a tremendous rapidity. Yet, Seiya didn't take the sword out of his sheath.

...It...It's too late!! We're going to die!!

All I could see from my eyes was the big comet that the Grand Lion created with his remaining nails. That comet was created with the Chain Destruction, and our future seemed dim. On this precise moment, Seiya touched the grip of his sword and moved it in a prickly motion. 「Explosion of Destruction..."Crimson Boom" ...! 」

Chapter 77: In This Painful World (1)

Seiya pulled his sword extremely fast and swung it at an astonishing speed! The sound swept through the air and, on that moment, a large explosion emitted a thunderous roar that almost burst my earlobes! The hero used his newly detonating sword to strike against the 1,000,000 attack points of the Grand Lion's power that transformed into a comet!

When the two supernatural powers collided with one another, a dazzling light was created and a tremendous shock was generated. That strong light blinded my eyes and I was blown away instantaneously!

「Uh...Ugh...」

...When I raised my body after falling down dramatically, I noticed that the Grand Lion stood at a place that was far away from Seiya. Speaking of which, Seiya held the sword that prevented the comet attack. None of them turned their backs on each other. They didn't even move an inch.

But, on that instant, a sound of cracking echoed profusely! Seiya's Platinum Sword shattered into pieces! And then, Seiya collapsed on the spot!

On the other hand, the Grand Lion, who looked attentively at Seiya, only had a small cut on his chest!

...Such...disparity!! The Crimson Boom was Seiya's ultimate attack and, even so, it was subpar against the Grand Lion's Volt Sky Axel....!!

However, something occurred when the Grand Lion tried to approach Seiya in order to kill him. The Grand Lion's chest became swollen and exploded! At the same time a glowing liquid fluid erupted from the cut on his chest! The upper body of the Grand Lion flared up! The Grand Lion screamed out loud when fire burst from the inside of his body!

The Grand Lion screamed desperately because of the repeated explosions on his body. The scene was so intense that my body trembled in fear.

...The destructive flames of sand magic...have entered the body of the Grand Lion....!!

When the flames finally subsided, the Grand Lion remained upright. Yet, all of his body turned black as if he had transformed into a charcoal.

—

「Seiya!!」

I ran towards Seiya's direction and held his fallen body. I wondered if he had deactivated his State Berserk. His hair had returned to its normal black hair. It looked like he was conscious given that his face was showing a painful expression.

When he noticed my presence, he immediately stood up in an alarming way.

「...What about the Grand Lion? 」

「It's all right! The Crimson Boom burned him! 」

I tried to calm him down. When I pointed in the enemy's direction to show him that he defeated him for real...There was no Grand Lion in sight.

「Human...you won. 」

I looked immediately on the voice's direction. A body that resembled a blackish charcoal sneaked behind the Queen. It was the Grand Lion!

「I got a fatal wound...Soon, I'll die. But, before that...I must at least get my reward. 」

Then, he grabbed the Queen's hair violently.

「What would make this human suffer the most...I thought about it for so long...Things would've been different if I had figured it out before.」

It...It can't be!! No!! Not the Queen!!

「And that...important thing for you was...something that I could break apart!! 」

I ran to the Queen in a hurry.

However, when he saw that I was coming near, the Grand Lion let go of the Queen's hair.

「...You. This is your entire fault. 」

And then, he rushed on my direction with the last portion of his energy!

...Ehh!? Me!? But, why!?

It was clear that the Grand Lion was no longer powerful. Still, his remaining strength would be enough to kill me.

Just before the nails of the Grand Lion slashed me up...something strange moved out of my chest.

It was an earth snake...It was a self-defense earth snake that Seiya left behind "for precaution".

The Grand Lion tried to pierce my heart with his nails. Nonetheless, the earth snake...

「Ugh...Ah...! 」

I heard painful growls. When I looked closely at what happened, I saw that the earth snake caught the Grand Lion's neck and started to choke him up!

The Grand Lion tried to grab the earth snake with both hands to tear it apart, but the earth snake wasn't crushed and didn't release from his neck!

Seiya murmured from behind my back.

「The earth snake that was protecting you...is the strongest earth snake that I've created so far. He won't be able to destroy it in his weakened state...」

The Grand Lion opened his eyes wide and stared at Seiya in the form of an enraged demon. He no longer tried to take away the earth snake from his neck. The enemy directed his feet towards Seiya and went towards his direction. Nevertheless, his movement eventually stopped. The arm that held the earth snake lost its power and dropped down...The Grand Lion fell to the ground on his knees as if all of his remaining strength disappeared on the spot.

Seiya approached the Grand Lion...

「...Endless Fall. 」

Seiya returned to his Earth Magic Warrior state. Then, he triggered his Endless Fall skill to finish off the Grand Lion without even touching him. In a short moment, the earth snake and the Grand Lion were pushed into the underground with a tremendous power.

When the Grand Lion and the earth snake disappeared from my field of vision, the beast people, who were far away, looked at us and began to make a fuss.

「His Majesty the Grand Lion was defeated...! 」

「The power of the evil god disappeared as well! 」

「It...It's over for us...! 」

The beast people, who lost their mighty boss, fled immediately as if they were dispersing like some spider's babies [EN: A really creepy analogy]. I felt relieved to see the outcome of Seiya's victory. However, Seiya fell on one knee on this very moment.

I rushed to Seiya's side. He was badly hurt. I put my hands on his abdomen to heal his severe wounds.

「I'm sorry...! It's my fault that you became like this...! 」

Seiya stared directly at me.

「Don't cry. And don't apologize. It's annoying. 」

「But...! 」

「I won. The result is good. Besides... 」

After exhaling deeply, Seiya professed the following words.

「I already told you this when we were in the heavenly world. Before we left, I said that I was "Perfectly Ready".」

「Hmm, yes! 」

Seiya stood up immediately after I applied a kind of first aid to his wound.

「Anyways, let's move the Queen to a safe place for now... 」

As soon as he said that, the hero fell unconsciously as if he had lost all of his strength.

Chapter 77: In This Painful World (2)

The next day.

I was staying at Queen Carmilla's old house in the town of Tarmine.

The walls and the floor were damaged because of the beast men, but most of the furniture was still intact. Seiya slept on a bed in one of the bedrooms.

Yesterday I cured all of his wounds with the power of my healing magic. After I put a cold towel on Seiya's forehead, I left the room quietly. Thankfully, he was sleeping soundly.

In the next room, the Queen talked to a man that I've met before.

「John Dae. You've suffered a lot. 」

「No. My hardships were nothing special compared to yours, my Queen. 」

This man's skin was dirty and brownish as if he were decaying from the outside. I didn't forget who this man was. He was the General John Dae of Tarmine. The beast men made him into an undead. Moreover, Seiya and I fought against him during the enlistment test.

The Queen noticed me and introduced me to the general.

「This is John Dae. He was the right hand man of the late King. 」

John Dae struggled to put on a smile. He bowed to me in respect.

「Some circumstances made me into a state of a half-undead person. Please forgive me.」

「Ye...Yes! No...I mean...don't worry! It's okay! *laughs awkwardly* 」

I couldn't look directly at John Dae's face because I did something terrible to him during the enlistment test. He would beat me for sure if he found out that I was that fish-man.

「It seems that all the beast men escaped from Tarmine. The power of the evil god vanished when the Grand Lion was defeated. The abilities from all the other beast men reduced to about a tenth of their power. They were afraid of the hero's counterattack.」

These beast men must've been very arrogant because they gained big amounts of power thanks to the protection of the evil god. Therefore, I was sure that it was pretty shocking to encounter a human being capable of surpassing the strength of their boss. Besides that, this same human managed to destroy the power of protection from the evil god in the process. Revolting against their new enemy wouldn't be ideal. They would probably die immediately. That's why they fled from this town one after another in a hurry.

The Queen smiled at John Dae.

「You were called the “Immortal General” when humans ruled this kingdom...Ironically, you’re now dead but you still didn’t die.」

Even though the Queen was joking, her face was full of compassion towards John Dae. He was probably a true warrior of his kingdom. His eyes overflowed with tears. However, he turned his face away from the Queen because he probably didn’t want to show her his vulnerable state.

「The...There are a few humans imprisoned in the basement cells that were probably going to be used as food or toys! I will instruct the free soldiers to release the prisoners!」

John Dae paid his respects and he went out the room after closing the door. I heard him instruct the remaining living soldiers by the end of the door to safeguard the Queen. Even though he was an undead, he was still a respected general.

「...Is it okay for you to be here and not by your hero’s side? 」

The Queen asked that particular question when we were left alone. My real feelings came out from my mouth involuntarily.

「Well...To be honest, I don’t know what kind of attitude I should have when dealing with my hero.」

I laughed miserably at the worried Queen.

「I...I am a useless goddess, you know! I’m such an idiot! I’m always interfering with his plans! Even though he is a human being, he is much more levelheaded than me! He is wise and strong! I’m just a hindrance, and to tell you the truth...it would be better for him to go on without me...」

「...Miss Goddess. 」

The Queen interrupted my words as I spoke unhappily.

「The beasts thought that I was an iron-like woman who felt no pain. But, the truth is, I am a weak person that can’t even admit that my daughter is dead.」

The Queen looked at the door of the bedroom where Seiya was sleeping.

「Even that child is human. Being strong doesn’t mean that he doesn’t feel any pain. I’m sure that this quest must’ve been too hard and too painful for him so far.」

「Pain...Painful? Seiya, you say? But...But, Seiya had lost all of his past memories! Besides, he said that his present self was different from his past self, and...」

「No matter how much he changed since then, he won’t be able to erase the fact that the outcome of this present world has happened because of his past self. “Regret” ...“Guilt” ...His heart is probably

bursting with these frustrating emotions. Nonetheless, he knows that such emotions are meaningless to save the world; therefore, he is probably burying them in the bottom of his heart.」

The Queen had a very sad expression on her face.

「Tha...That must be very painful to endure. 」

After loosening her expression, the Queen smiled at me.

「It's okay to stay next to him. This world is too harsh for a lone wolf. He needs someone by his side. You're a fool and a clumsy person, but that's all right. That is your own way of saving that child.」

「Bu...But...Seiya hates me... 」

Then, the Queen made a serious face.

「Even the Grand Lion was aware of something that wasn't supposed to be known... 」

「Eh? 」

I stared fixedly at the Queen's face. I didn't know the meaning of her confusing words. As soon as the Queen reached the door, she put her hand on her mouth.

「Oh my. I...I've been speaking impolitely against you for a while now! I apologize for my rudeness, Miss Goddess!」

「Ah...no. That's not true. 」

「I wonder why I am being like this. I feel at ease when I am around you. Maybe it's because Miss Goddess took care of me when you were a fish-man.」

「I see...That's probably right. 」

I stood up after laughing with the Queen.

「I...I will go see how Seiya's condition is. 」

「Yes. Great. 」

Before I left the room...

「...Thank you, Mother. 」

The Queen didn't hear my last word because I spoke with a lower voice.

—

I was startled when I opened the bedroom's door. Seiya had already got up from his bed.

「Seiya!! You're awake!? You should be resting... 」

「Hey. How long have I been asleep? 」

「Well, you slept all night long... 」

「I've made a mistake... 」

The hero gritted his teeth with a stern face.

「If everyone knows that I've defeated the Grand Lion, the Demon King's subordinates may attack Tarmine in full force.」

Seiya grabbed his armor and sheath, and ventured out of the room in a rush.

「Wait...Wait a moment! 」

When he left the old house, Seiya put his hand on the soil of the garden.

「I'm going to put the earth snakes all over this town. 」

The soil on which Seiya put his hand on was increasing and moving violently. I was sure that Seiya created dozens of earth snakes. No, he probably created hundreds and hundreds of them.

「...I can see that you woke up. 」

Suddenly, I heard John Dae's voice. He stood beside Seiya. Moreover, next to me was Queen Carmilla as well.

John Dae spoke to Seiya.

「I'm thankful that you defeated the Grand Lion and saved Tarmine. Even so. If you had saved Exfolia one year ago, nothing like this would ever had happened in the first place...」

While Seiya held his hand on the ground, John Dae approached him and grabbed his neck. The Queen changed her complexion then.

「John Dae! Calm down! 」

「No! I have a few words to say to this man! 」

John Dae stared at Seiya with a very demonic expression on his face.

「Why...Why...Why couldn't you protect Princess Tiana!! 」

「John Dae...!! 」

Both the Queen and I were taken aback by his words.

...A heavy air surrounded us. Still, Seiya put his hand on John Dae's shoulder.

On that precise moment...

slurping sound

John Dae's feet were buried in the ground up to his knees!

screams

And then, Seiya turned his back on John Dae, and continued to create more earth snakes.

「Wha...What the hell did you do!! 」

John Dae was deprived of his freedom by getting stuck in the ground because of Seiya's earth magic.

「What the hell is this!! 」

John Dae used all of his strength to get out from the ground. Before long, one of his feet got out of the soil.

「Oh. 」

Seiya looked impressed, but he immediately touched John Dae again.

slurping sound

「Whaaaat!? 」

This time, John Dae was buried up to his waist.

「You...You bastard...!! 」

I thought that he wouldn't be able to get out of there any more...

「Damn you!! I never give up!! 」

John Dae managed to pull his body out of the ground.

「Oh. Oh. 」

Seiya put his hand on John Dae's head, who was rushing against Seiya with vigor.

loud slurping sound

After a strong sound, I noticed that the whole body of John Dae was swallowed by the ground with a tremendous speed! No...No! Actually, when I looked carefully, I saw that only his forehead remained above the ground!

「Se...Seiya!! We can only see General John Dae's forehead!! He will suffocate!! 」

「He is an undead. Don't worry, he'll be fine. Just let him be. 」

「But...But, don't you feel sorry for him!? Poor general!! Just pull him out!! 」

After a while, Seiya grabbed the general's hair and pulled him out of the ground. John Dae, the immortal general, was sobbing miserably.

「Ugh...! It...It was agonizing...! It was so dark and muddy that I couldn't breathe properly...!」

Seiya stared at John Dae with a distrustful expression.

「Aren't you an undead? 」

「It was really agonizing even if I'm an undead!! 」

「I put your forehead above the ground for your own safety. Then why are you like this?」

「Are you an idiot!? I can't breathe with my forehead!! 」

The Queen's eyes were white while she gazed fixedly at Seiya, who continued to make earth snakes despite John Dae's complaints.

「Miss Goddess...What I said earlier was probably wrong. It seems that this child's heart does not beat the same way as the heart of a normal human being...」

「Ehhhhh... 」

John Dae yelled at Seiya who kept creating earth snakes continuously.

「I don't know why you're making all of those snakes! But, your efforts will be futile if you think that those things can protect this place! If everyone hears that the Grand Lion has been defeated, then the Imperial Machine Corps led by the Machine Emperor Oxelio will attack Tarmine immediately!」

「Machine...? Oxelio? Imperial Machine Corps...What's that? 」

The Queen explained the following after she heard my question.

「The Machine Emperor Oxelio is a demon that rules the north of this earth, the Baracuda continent. The Imperial Machine Corps consists of an army of powerful magical weapons called "Killing Machine" created by the Demon King. Rumors say that each Killing Machine is stronger than a beast man's ability. Moreover, their number exceeds over tens of thousands.」

Mo...More than tens of thousands of magical weapons!?

In contrast to my shocking expression, Seiya was not distressed.

「I already knew about that information from the beast men in Tarmine when I was hiding my appearance. Since then, I've been thinking of ways to fight against that enemy.」

「That's why I told you that creating those things would be useless. Muddy snakes won't stand a chance against the Imperial Machine Corps...」

「Who said that I'll use these earth snakes to fight with the enemy? I'm only creating them for surveillance...」

Seiya took his hand away from the ground. He must have completed the creation of the surveillance earth snakes. Then, he turned his gaze away from John Dae and stared closely at me.

「Lista. Open the portal. I have to return to the heavenly world in order to get ready to compete against the Imperial Machine Corps.」

Chapter 78: The Goddess of Earth

John Dae started to shout after he heard that Seiya wanted to return to the God's realm. I tried to explain to John Dae that the heavenly world was different from the earthly world. The flow of time was different in both worlds. Even though it's been a while since we've arrived in Exfolia, only one hour has passed in Exfolia in the perspective of the gods in the God's realm. In other words, for the gods, time was slow in the earthly world, while for the people, time was fast in the God's realm. Somehow, I managed to convince John Dae.

Suddenly, John Dae's expression changed and he looked at me with a serious face.

「Goddess, if that's true, then there's something I want you to do before you return to the heavenly world.」

「Eh? What do you want me to do? 」

「I...I want you to let me die. 」

「John Dae! What are you talking about? 」

The Queen raised her voice, but John Dae smiled tenderly at her.

「Queen Carmilla. Humans who have become undead won't be able to return to being humans. It's impossible no matter what kind of techniques or tools they use. On the contrary, our mind will slowly disappear and, once we lose our reason, we'll attack the people around us.」

Both the Queen and I were at a loss of words.

...Even so! I won't be able to let such a great general die in vain like this...!

「Goddess of the heavenly world. Please use the power of the heavens to grant my wish.」

John Dae smiled at me. I didn't know what to do, and so, I looked at Seiya. Then, the cold-hearted hero nodded his head and spoke as if it weren't anything special.

「Yeah. You may lose your mind at any moment. You should perish as soon as possible. 」

...!! So terrible!!

General John Dae wrinkled between his eyebrows.

「It's absolutely annoying to hear you say that...But, well...I guess you're correct. Goddess. Just do me this favor.」

「Is it really...okay? 」

John Dae nodded positively. It seemed that the Queen had accepted his decision. Then, he looked at me with his sincere expression and bowed respectfully. He said, 「I beg you 」. The Queen said the following words to John Dae before his ending.

「John Dae...I thank you sincerely for everything you've done for Tarmine. 」

「Queen Carmilla. I will be watching over Tarmine from the heavens. 」

My eyes ached painfully from watching this sad farewell. However, I mustn't cry! I was a goddess after all! In order to grant John Dae's wish, I had to do my best so that he could ascend to heaven smoothly and without pain!

I put my hand on John Dae's forehead.

「Then, from now on, the soul of General John Dae shall return to heaven! 」

I activated my healing powers. The holy healing spells caused a reaction on the body of the undead. A white smoke came out of John Dae's face where I put my hand on.

simmer sound

John Dae's face was full of anguish.

—

...Three minutes later. John Dae opened his mouth impatiently.

「Go...Goddess...! If you can...please, do it quickly ...! 」

「Ye...Yes! I know! 」

What the hell was I doing! I had to do it with much more power! The longer it takes, the harder it will be for General John Dae!

I took a deep breath and opened my eyes wide.

Ohhhh!! Let's burn the microcosms!! My full ultra-goddess force!! Open up!!

strong simmer sound

However, the holy light didn't spread more than three centimeters in diameter and burned only the forehead of John Dae.

Finally, John Dae grabbed his hair because of the ongoing pain.

「I can't do this anymoreeee!! This is too painfullllll!! This feels as if the sun is burning my skin with a magnifying glass!!」

「I...I'm truly sorry!! 」

With my current limited divine power, it could take a few hours to ascend John Dae to the heavens. Seiya said, 「Stop it 」 , while approaching John Dae.

「It's no use. Let me push you to the nucleus of this earth by the power of the Endless Fall. 」

「That will ascend me to hell instead!! I absolutely refuse to be killed by someone like you!!」

Then, Seiya exhaled a big sigh.

「This is a big waste of time. Let's leave him like this for now. However, I activated some earth snakes to exterminate him if he ends up losing his mind.」

And then, John Dae got several snakes wrapped on both of his hands, feet and neck like jewelry accessories.

The Queen put her hand on John Dae's shoulder, while displaying a very unpleasant expression.

「Okay then. John Dae. You shall be under my guidance for the time being. 」

「Ye...Yes! 」

The result ended up unfinished because of my failure. Nevertheless, I felt a bit happy to see the relaxed expressions of both the Queen and her general.

Then, Seiya and I went through the portal and we returned to the God's realm...

—

After arriving in the God's realm, I asked Seiya immediately.

「Seiya. How are you going to prepare for your fight against the Imperial Machine Corps? 」

「I want to improve my existing abilities this time rather than acquiring new skills. In other words, I want to perfect the mastery of earth magic.」

「Do you mean...to practice with the God of Earth? 」

「That's right. If you know who it is, great. Because I want to start practicing straightaway. 」

The gods of nature, such as fire, water, and earth, were also major entities in the God's realm. The God of Earth. No, it's actually the Goddess of Earth. I've met with the Mariya, the Goddess of Earth, several times before. I remember that she had a very gentle demeanor.

When we walked up a little further inside the square garden, we ended up finding the beautiful Flower Garden of the God's realm.

Under a clear sky, I saw a woman with a straw hat on top of a beautiful hair. Mariya, the Goddess of Earth, was watering some colorful flowers with a water pot.

「Lady Mariya. Hello. 」

「Oh my, Listarte. Hello. We have such a nice weather today. 」

A refreshing smile. Yes. As I thought, Mariya was a wonderful goddess!

When I told her that Seiya wanted learn earth magic, Mariya shook her head.

「But, as I can see, your hero is already familiar with earth magic, am I right? 」

Certainly, Seiya's earth magic was already at a high-level by now. He probably reached the "perfect mastery of earth magic". What did he want to learn then?

Seiya spoke to Mariya.

「To put it bluntly; I want to create monsters that are stronger than the earth snakes. I tried various things. But, it was too difficult to accomplish by my own. You, as the Goddess of Earth, are able to do it?」

Mariya nodded slightly.

「If you learn the "soil" first, then, you should be able to learn the "rock" element thereafter. If you learn how to master it, then you'll be able to create Rock-based monsters. If you're strong enough to cast them bigger than just mere rock monsters, you will be able transform those monsters as golems. They will be much stronger than earth snakes.」

「Golems!! I see!! So, you're trying to create a horde of monsters to fight against the Imperial Machine Corps!!」

「Yeah. That's right. 」

Both of us stared fixedly at Mariya. Before long, the Goddess of Earth smiled sympathetically.

「Based on the present status of the hero...I think it will be possible to achieve that much. However, I must warn you that rock-formation monsters are the highest degree of difficulty in earth magic. As a human hero, you won't be able to learn it overnight. I'll teach you everything you should know starting tomorrow.」

「No. I'd like to learn it as soon as possible. 」

This was getting into the usual course of action; therefore, I tried to explain to Mariya what Seiya was capable of.

「Huh, sorry Lady Mariya! But, this hero is amazing, you know! He learns the gods' skills extremely fast even though he is supposed to learn them in days! That's why...」

Mariya interrupted my words on that point.

「I've heard about this hero. A rare talent that the higher gods entrusted with the salvation of the SS-rank difficulty world. Certainly, he might be able to learn these earth skills quickly... Where one needs a full month to learn, he can probably learn it today or even tomorrow.」

「Yes! That's why...! 」

「This is different. I have one personal problem. 」

「Eh? 」

And then, Mariya had a slightly troubled face.

「Actually, I have a time limit. From noon to dusk is the only timeframe I can work with.」

Mariya put her hand on the straw hat and looked up at the sun in the sky.

「The sun will set soon. I can only act freely for two more hours today. 」

「Why? Why do you have a time limit? 」

「Unfortunately, I can't tell you the reason why. 」

「We have to save the world. The gods from the heavenly world usually cooperate with humans on times like this, am I right?」

「I am truly...sorry about this. 」

Mariya bowed her head to us in apology. I tried to defend Mariya's limitation excuse.

「Se...Seiya!! It's too bad, I know!! But, I'm sure that Lady Mariya must have deeper reasons for this!!」

Seiya was silent for a while...

「Well...it's all right. We can still practice on the remaining two hours. 」

「Yeah. I understand. So, let's get started now. 」

In this way, Seiya began his short training session.

—

Afterwards, I decided to leave the Flower Garden because I didn't want to interfere with Seiya's training.

...However, it was rather strange that a goddess had a time limit. Did she had, perhaps, an "illness"? But...But, did the God's realm have such weird things as earthly viruses?

After I returned back to the square, I saw a few familiar faces.

I saw that Aria and Adenela were sitting on a chair at the garden table of "Cafe de Celseus". Speaking of which, Celseus was carrying some coffee cups. I finally felt that I came back to the God's realm after I witnessed my family and friends. I smiled spontaneously.

「Aria! I'm home! 」

「Lista! 」

Aria rushed from her chair and hugged me tightly.

「I'm glad you're okay! It seems that you've successfully activated the secret of the Six-Hexagram to defeat the enemy and freed the Tarmine Kingdom! I'm so happy that you finally returned to the God's realm!」

「Ye...Yes. Well...you know. We managed to survive somehow... 」

In fact, the Six-Hexagram failed because of me. Then, Adenela recommended me some coffee to drink.

「O...Okay. Just drink...drink this for...now. It...It's not delicious...it's rather a mess...a boring...and useless coffee.」

「Hey!! Why are you talking like that!? I did my best to brew it carefully!! 」

I put the cup to my mouth to drink a little. Actually, it wasn't an awful coffee at all.

「Celseus! This coffee is not bad! I get a nice feeling as if it were a "delicious instant coffee"!」

「Oh...Oh, I see...What!! I used luxury beans to create this high-grade coffee!! And why are you comparing it to a common instant coffee instead!?!」

Celseus' wrath felt upon me. Then, Aria asked me the following.

「Listen, Lista. Where is Seiya? 」

「Hmm. He is practicing right now with Lady Mariya, the Goddess of Earth. 」

「...Mariya, you say. 」

I felt a little anxious because of Aria's silence.

「Eh!? It...It isn't all right!? Don't tell me that she's another strange goddess!? 」

「Ah, well. I didn't hear any strange rumors about Mariya. However, she does have something odd going on...because, Mariya never shows herself in the evenings...」

「Ah, I see. So, she does have that time limit. 」

「That might be a rule that only applies to her. There shouldn't be any problem if Seiya practices with her during the day. Just respect her decision.」

「Yes! I understand! 」

Afterwards, I stood up. I went to the dining hall in order to prepare a meal for Seiya.

...Although the short training had a time limit, it seemed that Mariya, the Goddess of Earth, was a normal goddess according to Aria! There should be no problem when compared with the lewd Mithis, the Goddess of Bow, or the crazy Zeth, the other Goddess of War!

...That was what I believed at that time.

Chapter 79: Cinderella Breakdown

I made a sandwich for Seiya. Before I knew it, it was almost dusk. I rushed immediately to the Flower Garden of the God's realm.

As I approached the area, I noticed that Seiya and Mariya were talking about something a few steps away from the Flower Garden.

「Hero. We're done for today. 」

「I want to keep practicing. 」

「I told you that I'm only available until dusk. 」

「I don't see any bad physical condition on you. Let's continue. 」

「I...I can't. 」

「Let's do it. 」

「I refuse. 」

「Let's practice for one more hour. 」

「That's impossible. 」

「Let's practice for 30 minutes then. 」

「Please give me a break... 」

So...So persistent!! He sounded like a salaryman trying to convince a hostess!!

Seiya didn't stop trying in spite of Mariya's refusal. Suddenly...

「U...Ugh! 」

Mariya put her hand on her mouth as if she was suffering from a kind of illness. I couldn't watch it silently anymore. I ran to Mariya's side and I opened my hands to cover her.

「Seiya!! You can't go further than this!! Don't you see that Lady Mariya is in pain!! 」

Then, I looked back at Mariya.

「Are...Are you all right, Lady Mariya? 」

On that moment.

「Stay away from me!! 」

「What!? 」

I was surprised when Mariya shouted aggressively at me. She was not her usual kind-hearted self. When Mariya noticed that she lost her composure for a second, she immediately bowed to me in apology.

「I...I apologize. Excuse me, but it is enough for today. I'll see you tomorrow... 」

While holding her hand on her mouth, she walked away instantly.

I was angry with Seiya after Mariya was gone.

「Hey, Seiya! You treated her terribly! Didn't you promise that you would only practice with her until dusk?」

However, Seiya didn't show any remorse for his actions. Instead, he was quite frustrated with the outcome.

「Oh. It just looked like indigestion. I wanted to continue practicing all day long... 」

And then, he sent a cold gaze on my direction.

「It can't be helped. Lista. You should go first. I'll do the practice independently from now on. I just need to focus on what I've learned of earth magic from the last two hours.」

「I...I got it... 」

He was a one of a kind hero. Still, it was necessary for him to learn that new earth magic skills in order to save Exfolia. I didn't say any more unnecessary words and walked away from the Flower Garden.

—

The next day's late morning.

As usual, I brought a lunch box for Seiya, who slept for a short moment at the summoning chamber. I reminded him of what happened yesterday.

「Listen. You won't force Lady Mariya today, like you did yesterday right? 」

「No. I just want to practice straightaway. I have a lot to catch up today because of the time I lost yesterday. If everything goes smoothly, I'll learn it by the end of the day.」

「I don't know! If you start now, you'll only have a few hours until dusk! Are you sure about this, Seiya...」

「Don't fret. I have a plan. 」

「Wha...What is your plan? Se...Seiya? 」

I felt a huge anxiety in my heart when I heard the words of a confident hero that walked straight into the temple without talking too much.

—

「Go...Good morning... 」

Mariya was looking at Seiya with a skeptical look. She probably became like this because of Seiya. Yesterday, he forced her to stay longer against her will.

I thought that Seiya would say 「Let's start the practice immediately 」 . However, Seiya bowed his head in apology much to my surprise.

「I apologize for yesterday. Even though saving the world is extremely urgent, it seems that I was a bit too impatient. Let's do it at your own pace today. I'll respect the timing of your limit until dusk.」

「Eh? 」

Mariya and I were both surprised. It was rare to see a well-behaved Seiya. Well, it would be natural to call someone well-behaved...but, in Seiya's case...

「Is...Is that so! I'm relieved to hear you say that! 」

「Yeah. I'll be in your guidance until dusk. But, before that... 」

Seiya looked the surrounding area.

「I want to learn how to create rock monsters today. However, I don't want to create destructive Golems to ruin this beautiful Flower Garden that has been carefully groomed.」

Then, Seiya approached Mariya and touched her shoulder slightly.

「...Cave Along. 」

Mariya and Seiya's bodies gradually sank into the ground.

「Hey...Wait a minute, Seiya! 」

I rushed on Seiya's direction and entered the Cave Along as well.

—

...I was shocked when I came inside of the Cave Along. The interior was not the usual narrowed-space. After the battle with the Grand Lion plus the training of yesterday, it was likely that Seiya's earth magic got powered up. It was a huge space with a radius of about ten meters wide. While walking at the side,

Seiya filled the muddy walls with magical stones. Thanks to those magical devices, the whole space became brighter.

「It will be okay to create rock monsters in here. 」

Nonetheless, Mariya had an uncomfortable expression on her face.

「I appreciate your care about the Flower Garden. However, hero...I must say that there's no sun in here. Therefore, I won't know how much time has passed on the surface... 」

「No worries. We have a clock on that wall... 」

Seiya moved the tip of his finger. Inside of the large cave, a round clock appeared on a wall.

...This...This seemed suspicious...

I doubted the effectiveness of that weird-looking clock based on Seiya's personality. Nevertheless, Mariya was a pure goddess.

「All right. I don't have anything to worry about! 」

She was showing an innocent smile.

—

The training began. Mariya created a golem that was more than 3 meters tall. It was a powerful monster with a full body made of rocks. Seiya tried to imitate her. Yet, he could only create a golem's arm from the soil. It seemed that it wasn't possible for him to create a whole body yet.

「It is a difficult process, but you made a great accomplishment. You managed to create a portion of the golem's body so quickly.」

Mariya praised Seiya's results. After that, he tried his best again and again, until he made a decent-looking golem...As soon as I thought that he finally made it, the golem collapsed on the ground. As Mariya said, rock-based monsters were the most difficult skill to master within the power of earth magic. It looked like Seiya won't be able to master this skill immediately.

...How many times did he try to create golems without mistakes? Mariya started to feel restless about the passing time.

「Excuse me, hero. Is that the correct time? 」

Nonetheless, Seiya pointed to the muddy clock with an unreadable expression.

「Don't worry. It's still two o'clock. 」

The clock hands were past two o'clock. Mariya showed a relieved expression then.

「I see! Great! 」

...More time passed since then. Somehow, Seiya managed to create a reasonable golem. This time, however, he tried to create two golem bodies and three golem bodies. Even so, it seemed that mass production was quite difficult to achieve. He couldn't increase his golems by more than two or three extra bodies.

Suddenly, Mariya asked Seiya the following.

「Hero. What time is it? 」

「Don't worry. It's still two o'clock. 」

「Great! 」

It was true. When I looked closely at the clock hands, I saw that it wasn't even half past two yet...It didn't change that much since a while ago...

...No. Wasn't this clock a little strange!?

I was sure that more than one hour has passed since we've arrived here! Yet, that clock was barely moving!

...!...I see!! A clock that moved slowly...That was Seiya's strategy!! But, this was obvious!! Mariya will definitely notice this irregularity!!

Nevertheless.

「Hero. Are we okay with time? 」

「It's still two o'clock. 」

「Great! 」

—

「Hero. Can you tell me what time is it? 」

「Two o'clock. 」

「Ah, great! 」

—

Even though Seiya's response was the same, Mariya didn't notice that it's been two o'clock for a very long time now.

「It is quite fun to teach the hero about earth magic! 」

Mariya looked a bit excited about practicing with Seiya. Well, in fact, Seiya absorbed everything that she taught him immediately. He had great memory as well since he always remembered what she said. He was a student worthy of teaching earth magic. She was so enthusiastic that she didn't notice the passage of time.

...My "body clock" warned me that it was almost dusk in the surface. I secretly approached Seiya and whispered on his ear.

「Hey, listen. Is it okay to continue with practice? 」

「No problem. Right now, my top priority is to master earth magic. 」

「But... 」

「I need it if I want to save Exfolia. 」

「O...Okay... 」

—

...The training continued endlessly with the clock that didn't move past two. Eventually, Seiya nodded positively when he saw that his golem managed to assemble fifty bodies. He looked pleased at this spectacular scene.

「All right. That was successful. This practice was very effective. 」

「Se...Seiya! Let's go up to the surface now! 」

And then, Seiya deactivated Cave Along.

Seiya, Mariya and I raised up to the surface, and...I was dumbfounded.

Two beautiful moons stood above my head! The sky was full of shining stars!

My knees shuddered relentlessly as my face turned slowly on Mariya's direction!

「Thi...Thi...This is!! It's already night here!! 」

Seiya spoke to Mariya in a heartless way.

「Why did you have a time limit? I don't see anything wrong with you. 」

Mariya's face was pale like a ghost's face...

...What!?

I felt a sense of crankiness.

I couldn't see everything well in the dark space of Cave Along. Except now. The brightness of the two moons of the God's realm illuminated the night. Likewise, Mariya's face became quite visible as well. That said, I could see something thick on Mariya's face. That was...

「Mu...Mustache!? Lady Mariya has a mustache!? 」

I was so shocked that I shouted aloud. Mariya noticed my reaction and realized that her secret was exposed. Then...

「Don't look...!! 」

She screamed with very thick voice coming from her bearded mouth.

「Wa...Wa...Wa...Wait a minute!! Do...Don't tell me that Lady Mariya is a god! 」

「...A god? 」

She no longer tried to hide her bearded face. Mariya screamed at us with a robust voice of a strong man.

「You know what, I am a god and a goddess. I'm actually a new type of deity that doesn't have a specific category...You could call me a "ONEE* deity"!!」

「ONEE deity!? 」

I lost my words after I heard the title of a deity that I've never heard existed in the God's realm. Mariya muttered in manly voice while looking up at the night sky.

「Lady Isister is the only one that knows that I'm an ONEE deity. I've...been hiding it until now. I am hairy; therefore, I have to shave my face regularly. However, even if I shave my beard, it will turn blue after a few hours. That's why I've been hiding it from everybody after dusk.」

Then...Then, why didn't she shave her face one more time at dusk?...No...No! I didn't have time to care about something meaningless like this! I had to leave this place quickly before it became too troublesome!

「Un...Understood! I appreciate that you taught Seiya about the next steps of earth magic! Well then, excuse us!」

I tried to leave hurriedly by pushing Seiya's back, while showing her a smile.

「Wait right there, you damn two...!! 」

Mariya stood in front of us rapidly in such an aggressive manner.

「What are you doing? Are you trying to go home? You can't leave now just by showing your "appreciation" with me!」

「I...I...I'm truly sorry!! I won't tell anyone about your secret!! 」

「Not you. Seiya cutie** will be the one to take responsibility for exposing my secret. 」

「Seiya cutie!? 」

Mariya was pointing her finger towards Seiya.

「Seiya cutie is a human that knows the secret of a deity. If he knows everything about me, then he won't be able to get out of this Flower Garden for the rest of his life! Since this is what happened...then, I shall say...let's live together from now on!」

「You...You must be kidding me! Seiya has a mission to save Exfolia! 」

「I don't know and don't care about such a thing. 」

I trembled in fear after I saw the horrifying look of this ONEE deity's eyes.

...This...This god was not that wonderful in the first place!! It...It was another strange god!! What the heck was going on with the God's realm!?

However, Seiya didn't move an inch and just looked directly at Mariya.

「Hey, "Blue Mustache"... 」

「Who's the blue mustache, you weasel!! 」

「You are. Thank you for teaching me earth magic. But, Lista is correct. I have to save Exfolia. I have no time to play with you in the Flower Garden.」

Still, Mariya grinned sinisterly.

「Nope. I won't let you get away from here. 」

As soon as she professed that ultimatum, the ground around us raised up! Suddenly, a huge rock wall emerged from the soil and surrounded us like a cage!

「This huge rock wall trapped us! What should we do, Seiya? 」

However! Seiya already rushed towards Mariya!

「Eh. So, you're coming for me, the invoker of earth magic, instead of destroying the rock wall....I see. As expected of you, Seiya cutie. You have a good sense of things.」

Seiya approached Mariya! He tried to touch her shoulder!

...This...This was...! He was going to bury Mariya in the ground as he did with John Dae!

Even so, Mariya didn't make a sight movement!

「Ah? Were you going to use earth magic against me, the Goddess of Earth? Too bad! I'm sorry to say this, but that's a stupid move! I have MAX resistance to earth magic! Seiya cutie's earth magic won't work against me!」

「Oh. Okay, I'll get a little serious with you then. 」

As soon as he touched Mariya's shoulder...

slurping sound

「Whaaaaat!? 」

While shouting aloud, Mariya's ankles were buried in the ground!

「Wha...What the hell is this power!! You managed to fill part of my legs with soil even though I'm resistant to earth magic!!」

「Just release the rock wall that surround us. 」

Mariya grinned wickedly.

「I have to warn you that this Flower Garden is my territory!! My power has already been activated on the soil in all of this area!! You have no chance of winning, Seiya cutie!!」

「Hmm... 」

slurping sound

Mariya didn't even touch Seiya's shoulders! And yet, Seiya's ankles buried in the ground!

「Se...Seiya!! 」

In the meantime, Mariya managed to pull her legs out of the ground.

laughs maniacally

「Our positions have reversed! 」

While the ONEE deity laughed triumphantly, she approached Seiya's face, whose legs were still stuck in the soil.

「Eh, he! Seiya cutie's earth "snake"...I wonder if I'll lick it! 」

The...The worst!! Too vulgar!!

She was worse than Mithis! This devilish and cruel ONEE deity slowly approached Seiya's lower body!

However, on this moment.

slurping sound

「...What? 」

Mariya's legs sank into the ground once again! In a second, Seiya used his fist against her head!

Mariya's eyes became white for a brief moment...

「I...I won't lose to you!! 」

She immediately took her feet out of the ground and went behind Seiya's back, who couldn't move yet!

laughs deviously

「I won't forgive you anymore!! I'll "dig" you from behind!! Not with earth magic, but with my special ONEE divine sense!!」

..."Dig from behind"!? Wha...What the heck did she mean by that!? I didn't want to know, because it sounded like something extremely obscene!!

Mariya lifted up her dress as she approached Seiya's back. However, her movements stopped abruptly.

「...Ugh? 」

Seiya's legs were still buried in the soil because of the power of Mariya's earth magic. Nonetheless, Seiya managed to grab his sheath with his Platinum Sword. On that very moment, Seiya stretched his arms to his back and he used the sheath to hit Mariya's brain! He hit her head several times like a hammer!

hammering sound

Mariya's tights dip into the ground!

continuously hammering sound

Mariya's waist dip into the ground!

Then, Seiya took a deep breath.

「...Here I go. Take my greatest magic force. 」

As soon as he muttered, he beat Mariya with his sheath by using the whole power from his body!

huge hammering sound

...Soon, Mariya disappeared from our sight completely! No...Actually, I noticed that only her forehead was at the surface!

I rushed to Seiya. He pulled his feet from the ground and removed the sand dust from his body.

「Se...Seiya!! Is Lady Mariya going to be all right!? Only her forehead is at the surface!! 」

「Like the undead, gods don't die. It's okay. 」

「Bu...But! 」

Seiya didn't care one bit about Mariya. Instead, he looked at the palm of his hands.

「Hmm. I succeeded in the productions of mass rock rock monsters. Furthermore, my earth magic became proficient enough to bury an "enemy with strong resistance to earth magic"...」

「No, not an "enemy" per se!! 」

Then, Seiya stepped on top of Mariya's head, who was slightly above the ground, when he walked a little further ahead. He stared at the beautiful moons of the God's realm while he touched his glossy hair.

「Perfectly Ready. 」

「You're stepping on her!! Seiya!! You're really stepping on her head!! 」

Chapter 80: The Construction of a New Kingdom

Seiya ordered me to open the portal to Exfolia. However, the destination was not for Tarmine this time. It was for Galvano.

I did as he told me to do, and I opened the portal that led to Galvano. After opening the portal, we looked carefully at our surroundings, but we didn't see any beast men.

「Seiya. Do you want to go tell the people from the Light of Hope that you've defeated Bunogeos and the Grand Lion?」

「I do, but I wanted to see Galvano's current situation as well. This place could be an important base for the future along with Tarmine.」

「Base? 」

Seiya bent down and touched the soil at his feet. Soon, the ground rose up and a giant golem crawled from there as if it had awakened directly from the soil. Then, Seiya produced ten more golems in a blink of an eye.

「...If you find any remaining beasts, wipe them out. 」

The golems nodded silently. Then, they started to walk slowly but steady.

—

After going through the long stairs for a while, we arrived at the Light of Hope. The inhabitants gathered around me and Seiya. Among them was the settlement leader, Brut.

Brut looked stunned when I smiled at him while showing him thumbs up.

「He...Hey. Don't tell me that you've defeated Bunogeos for real? 」

「Yes, we defeated him! Even the Grand Lion, the ruler of this Kingdom, has been killed!」

「No way...! Even the Grand Lion...! 」

After a brief silence, the inhabitants cheered enthusiastically. I noticed that the girl named Eich, the one who created this settlement with earth magic, had tears in her eyes.

「Hero...Thank you so much...! 」

Still, Seiya spoke in a cold-hearted manner like always.

「Don't try to go to the surface just because the ruler of this continent was defeated. I heard that a strong enemy lives in the continent at the south of Radral continent, am I right?」

「Yes. Emperor Ceremonic...It's a monster that is said to rule the southern continent, called Cress, across the sea. I heard from a rumor that this Emperor uses very powerful magic.」

I was shocked when I heard the topic of their conversation.

...Eh! I didn't know any of that! I see!

I thought that I knew many things about Exfolia. But, it seemed that Seiya got a better research on that aspect than me...I secretly felt frustrated.

「Until now, the Grand Lion ruled the Radral continent. However, now that the Grand Lion has fallen, there's a high possibility that the other enemies will learn of this and try to invade this continent by crossing the sea. So, you have two choices now. You can move your settlement to Tarmine or continue living underground for a bit longer.」

Eich looked silently at the people from the Light of Hope. After noticing that Eich was conflicted by deciding what the next course to take, Brut spoke the following words.

「I'll stay here. Galvano is my hometown after all. 」

All the women and men agreed with Brut's decision to stay behind.

「I prefer to live in the land that I'm accustomed with. 」

「I've been living underground as far as I can remember, so it won't do any hurt to remain here for a bit longer.」

Then, Brut approached Seiya.

「Besides...you're going to defeat the Emperor Ceremonic soon, isn't that right? 」

Brut touched Seiya's chest with his fist. That action showed Brut's gratitude.

—

We gave our farewell to the people of the Light of Hope. Then, I opened the portal and we went to the Queen's old house in Tarmine. Soon, the General John Dae came rushing to us.

「So, you've come back. It was faster than I thought it would be. 」

Suddenly, Seiya hit the head of the General John Dae with his fist.

「Why the hell did you do that!? 」

「I had to confirm if you still had a lucid mind. 」

「Of course I have!! Don't you see that I'm speaking with you!! 」

After the huge ruckus, Queen Carmilla and her remaining soldiers came to be old house immediately. After looking at the surroundings, Seiya made the following statement.

「Now we need to get ready to fight against the Imperial Machine Corps. 」

First, Seiya collected all of the earth snakes that he left in Tarmine for surveillance. Hundreds of earth snakes gathered around his feet.

Those snakes were completely silent, and yet, Seiya seemed to understand what they told him. He nodded positively at them and responded with the words, 「Yeah, yeah 」 . It was actually a surreal sight. Before long, the earth snakes disappeared into the ground.

「Okay. There seems to be no beast men left in Tarmine. 」

「Ah. Did you check it out just to be in case? 」

「That's right. We mustn't underestimate them. Besides, now that we're the only ones left behind, I shall harden the inside.」

「What do you mean by "harden the inside"? 」

「From now on, Tarmine will be surrounded by a... 」

Seiya stretched his hand to the horizon. Moreover, his eyes were looking at the landscape beyond the town.

「... "Great Iron Wall". 」

On that moment, a huge rumbling sound rang on our earlobes! At the same time, both the Queen and I fell behind, and we keeled over at John Dae, who fell as well!

「Wha...What? 」

The first who noticed what was going on was John Dae.

「Look at that!! 」

John Dae pointed to something in the distance with the tip of his finger...There was a huge rock wall in the distance that emerged at the boundary of this town. It was several of ten meters high. After the rumbling stopped, I looked around. As far as I could see, that huge rock wall surrounded us by 360 degrees.

「Wha...Wha...What...! 」

John Dae and I were speechless.

「The Great Iron Wall is fifty meters high and one meter in thickness. Soil hardness is no different from steel. It won't be easy to make a hole on it even if our enemies have over 300,000 attacking points.」

...The hardness was amazing. Even so...it was unbelievable how he could surround the entire vast area of Tarmine with earth magic alone.

Earth magic user Eich was also a rare witch who transformed a settlement on the underground. But, it looked like Seiya had surpassed Eich's magical skills by far when he finished his training with the God of Earth.

「The sloped rock walls won't be climbed easily because of an outward inclination. The problem is an attack from the sky...」

Then, Seiya switched his current profession to Fire Magic Warrior and released countless of Automatic Phoenixes in the sky.

「If all of you go underground like the Light of Hope, you'll be able to perfectly cope with sky attacks. However, there are many problems associated with that; one of them is the lack of sunlight. So, let's do this way for the time being...」

John Dae, who lost his voice for a long moment, finally opened his mouth.

「By the way...I heard that the Imperial Machine Corps don't have any flying form in their army.」

「True. Tarmine would've been attacked by now if this world had enemies that could fly in the sky. That's certain. However, in war, tactics changes constantly. There is a possibility that the enemy could manufacture a flying type. Perhaps, they have already succeeded in creating new forms of attack.」

「You...You always think too much... 」

Seiya changed his profession to Earth Magic Warrior again. Then, he stretched his hands forward. A huge rumbling happened immediately.

「Se...Seiya? What did you do this time? 」

「I made a new rock wall beyond the first rock wall that I've created before. 」

「An outer wall!? Is this place surrounded by double walls now!? 」

「That's right. 」

The Queen, I, and John Dae as well, were amazed by Seiya's precautions against external threats. We laughed awkwardly at first, but before long, we no longer laughed anymore.

...Because, Seiya created another wall beyond the double walls.

「Hey, hey, hey! Didn't you say that the hardness of the Great Iron Wall was comparable to steel?」

「I have to make as many as I can. It will be safer that way. 」

「But, if you surround this area with too many walls, won't it be difficult for us to watch the outside from the lookout towers?」

「We have the earth snakes. I put them outside of the walls and between each wall as well. The earth snakes' eyes are connected with my own eyes. So, we have no problem with that.」

...After making five-layered walls, Seiya took a deep breath.

「Okay. Next, I'm going to create golems. 」

On this moment. Many of the survivors, who were watching Seiya from afar, ran on his direction immediately upon seeing how strong he were. A woman wearing a robe and a man wearing an armor stood in front of us.

「Excuse me! I'm Charoy! Hero, please let me help you with my magic! 」

「I'm Presco! I can help you too! My strength is formidable you know! 」

There were many Tarmine survivors behind us. Many of them were injured because of the beast men's mistreatment. Yet, their eyes shined brightly.

...A...Amazing!! We were getting lots of support from the people!! Our new comrades!!

A few of them still blamed Seiya for the fact that the beast men ruled Tarmine. However, many others said that past was the past. Therefore, they were grateful to the person that defeated the Grand Lion. They truly wanted to lend their power to Seiya. I was deeply moved by these people's earnest feelings.

And then...Seiya looked at everybody that gathered around him and said the following.

「I don't need you. 」

「What!! 」

I shouted aloud.

「You shouldn't be saying that!! These people are finally on our side!! 」

「The enemy are machines that move with magic. It will attack endlessly even without sleeping nor eating. Humans are at a disadvantage against such opponents.」

「That...That might be true. But, there must be something useful they can do! 」

Then, Seiya nodded slightly.

「Yeah, farming. No one will be able to get out of Tarmine for a while. Therefore, it's crucial to set up a self-sufficient system like the one in the Light of Hope. Everyone here should work hard on agriculture from now on.」

However, the man in an armor called Presco disagreed with Seiya's suggestion.

「No! I want to use my strength to fight against the Imperial Machine Corps! 」

「Can you fight well without eating, drinking nor sleeping during a full week? 」

「Ugh! It...It's impossible to fight energetically on those conditions...! 」

「Of course. Then, just do farm work. 」

「But...But, with my fire magic... 」

「I don't need it. Use it for farming. 」

「I...I could fight against the enemy using my bow and arrow... 」

「I don't need it. Focus on agriculture instead. 」

Seiya stubbornly recommended agriculture to everyone no matter what they said. He sounded like a "stubborn farmer uncle". The survivor residents, who were trying to cooperate with us, eventually returned back after Seiya destroyed their enthusiasm. Soon, they disappeared from our sight completely.

「Se...Seiya...!! You...You chased away everybody...!! 」

「No problem. Now, I can focus on creating golems. 」

I sighed deeply after I saw how the hero created golems from the ground continuously...

「We...Well, are you doing this to avoid unnecessary human deaths? Hero. It looks like you're trying to take this entire burden by yourself.」

「I wonder... 」

I heard the Queen's voice. Still, Seiya was staring at the golems with fixed eyes.

「These golems are better choices. As long as the core of their heart is not destroyed, they will run semi-permanently. Even if all of the living organisms in Exfolia end up dead, they will continue to move regardless of that outcome.」

「Do...Don't say such a horrible thing...! 」

「Besides, golems don't act selfishly like humans do. And, since I've made them myself, they will never betray me. Golems are better.」

「C'mon!! I'm sure those people wouldn't betray you!! 」

「That might be true. But, golems won't betray me no matter what. Golems are better. 」

I couldn't say anything anymore after I saw how Seiya declared his absolute confidence in golems.

—

Afterwards, Seiya continued to make golems without taking a break. After a long while, the whole area became jam-packed with golems.

Twenty golems created a single line. Next to this line, more were assembled. I could count thirty lines of twenty golems each.

As expected, John Dae was stunned at such sight. He asked the following after Seiya created six-hundred golems himself.

「He...Hey. How much more are you going to make? 」

「If the enemy attacks in large numbers, then, we have to counterattack it with large numbers as well. If the Imperial Machine Corps are tens of thousands, then I'll have to create tens of thousands of golems.」

「To create tens of thousands!? Tarmine will become the Golem Kingdom by this rate!! 」

「What's wrong? In my world, there are more sheep than humans. So, I don't see any problem if there are more golems than humans.」

「No...No...But...Even so...! 」

The Queen smiled at John Dae, who had a puzzling expression on his face.

「John Dae. Tens of thousands of golems won't stay in Tarmine indefinitely. The hero is creating this large Legion of golems to invade the northern region.」

「Ah, yeah...Is that so. I see. 」

Nonetheless, Seiya spoke differently to Queen.

「Not quite. I'm not going to leave Tarmine for a while. 」

「Eh!? Are you not going to attack the northern region!? Then, why are you planning to create tens of thousands of golems!？」

「All golems will be used intercept the invading enemies. Besides the threat of the Imperial Machine Corps from the north, we have to deal with the Emperor Ceremoni from the south. We might have to

deal with these two simultaneously. The worst-case scenario will be if they have already contacted each other at this point.」

「But, both of them are conceited Emperors. I don't think they will get in touch with each other. Besides, they are on opposite directions, aren't they?」

「No. There is a precedent. Bunogeos contacted with the Grand Lion by using a crystal ball even though he was far away. As long as there's a possibility of a joint attack, I won't be moving away from here immediately. Once the preparations for Tarmine become complete, I'll head for Galvano. I'll build a fortress near Galvano with earth magic to deal with the threat from the Emperor of the south. I have to make sure that I prepare everything in advance.」

The Queen was astonished. After a short moment, the Queen finally muttered the following.

「That...That really took me by surprise...! 」

John Dae also took a deep gulp.

「You...You are creating golems all by yourself, without having any ally nor comrades...Is...Is this really the work of a hero?」

John Dae and the Queen couldn't hide their dumbfounded faces at the cautious hero that equipped himself with tremendous preparations in order to be ready for the enemy invasion.

Chapter 81: The Enemy Invasion

Three days later. Seiya continued to create golems day and night.

「...According to reports from soldiers, the total number of golems has finally exceeded the 20,000 mark.」

John Dae spoke with a forced smile. When I looked at the ridiculous amount of golems that spread in the horizon, I smiled in a similar way.

At this precise moment, John Dae and I looked down upon Tarmine from a lookout tower. This was the tower where the Grand Lion had the Queen prisoner. But, right now, this place was used as a facility for the surviving soldiers. They used it for monitoring. From the top of the tower, I could see the five-layered rock wall that Seiya created to surround this area. Seiya placed 2,000 golems on the border of the first rock wall to strengthen the protection of Tarmine.

John Dae murmured while looking at the outer wall.

「At first, I thought it was too much...But, if I think carefully about it now, his actions were probably due to his hidden feelings.」

「Feelings? 」

「He couldn't save the world...and Tarmine was destroyed...So this time, he is trying to save the world by carefully preparing excessively like this...」

I was surprised to hear John Dae's remarks about Seiya. He said cruel words to Seiya not too long ago. And yet, he reconsidered those thoughts while he tried to analyze Seiya's true intentions.

「Ah, well. That was just what I thought to myself. But, if this wasn't the case, then why would he go this far just to protect this place.」

「Ah, ahah. Certainly... 」

I laughed awkwardly. Then, John Dae tightened his expression.

「However, goddess. Don't get me wrong. I won't be able to forgive him from the bottom of my heart. That day won't certainly come. He was the one that couldn't save Princess Tiana...」

John Dae was a loyal general. Actually, it was natural for a soldier to feel devoted for a princess. Still, I felt that he had a special fondness for Princess Tiana.

「Sorry, General John Dae. But, what was the relationship between Princess Tiana and you?」

「I taught swordsmanship to the princess from a very young age. She didn't have the qualities of a great swordswoman. Still, Princess Tiana practiced hard because she really loved it.」

...Hmm. It seemed that I was indebted to this person in my previous life...But, I didn't remember it at all.

「I've always gave her a ride on my shoulders when she was young. The princess was always cheerful and pretty like a flower...」

John Dae spoke happily about Princess Tiana while recalling the good old days. Suddenly, I noticed something in particular when I stared at his blissful face.

「John Dae...Don't tell me that you...feel "that way" about Princess Tiana? 」

John Dae had a conflicted expression on his face when he heard my words. He looked around us to make sure that no one was nearby...

「It seems that I can't hide it from a goddess. 」

His brownish rotten cheeks were slightly red. He looked somewhat shy.

「Yes. I loved her dearly. More than anyone else in this world. 」

「...John Dae. 」

I put my hand on John Dae's shoulder and said the following words.

「Excuse me...But, I'm feeling slightly disgusted. I mean, you and Princess Tiana are many years apart from each other, am I right? And...Sorry. But, you're not my type. Yeah. However, I do feel a little happy to know how deeply you feel...」

「What!! Why are you feeling disgusted about my feelings!? By the way, weren't you the one that asked me about my feelings in the first place!？」

At that time, a soldier came rushing to us.

「Report! I have a report! 」

「So noisy!! What the hell is going on!! 」

Although John Dae replied harshly...

「We have sighted enemy's movements coming from the north!」

「...What did you say? 」

Both John Dae and I changed our complexions abruptly. All of us stared at north from the lookout tower.

My eyes, which had better vision than humans did, caught the glimpse of a group of humanoid weapons that created formation lines. They marched towards here to invade us.

The sturdy metal bodies reflected the sunlight. I noticed that a red light glowed on their heads. They walked like human beings and they had saber-like swords on their hands. They came to us in full force.

「The Imperial Machine Corps...! They finally came...! 」

When John Dae raised his arm, the soldier rang the bell in the tower.

「Tell the people of the town to go to their homes! They mustn't come out in any way! 」

John Dae instructed the soldier urgently. I also spoke to John Dae in a hurry.

「I...I'm going to where Seiya is now! I have to tell him about this immediately! 」

When I tried to go down the tower, I saw that Seiya was already climbing up the stairs.

「Ah, Seiya! Just in time! The Imperial Machine Corps have arrived! 」

「My earth snakes already informed me about that. That's why I came here. It's easier to see the situation from the top of the tower.」

Seiya didn't panic at all. When he came to the top of the tower, he narrowed his eyes and saw that the Imperial Machine Corps were approaching the outer wall.

The number of the Imperial Machine Corps were less than expected. It seemed that they were no thousands after all. In addition, they were not surrounding Tarmine to attack. Actually, they were just marching to the northern area. I became confused. Maybe they didn't know that the Grand Lion was defeated. And if they knew about it, why did they come in a full force? This was not what we've expected it to be.

John Dae proposed the following idea to Seiya.

「Why don't you bring all of the golems guarding the outer wall to march north and eliminate those Killing Machines?」

「No. This might be an ambush. The golems won't move from their positions. We have to wait. The golems were made to deal with the Imperial Machine Corps if they approached the wall to invade us.」

「Hmm... 」

John Dae didn't say anything anymore because he couldn't argue with Seiya's reasoning.

The Imperial Machine Corps approached the wall in a military formation line. The golems made by Seiya were standing still in front the outer wall.

The golems didn't hesitate because they weren't humans. Sensing the golems' offensive posture of attack, the Killing Machines acted immediately. Both of the sides clashed unexpectedly. The fight began

with such a tremendous power. The battle between Seiya's golems and the magical weapons "Killing Machines" had begun for real.

...!...I wondered if it will be all right!! Let's hope that the golems will finish them in one go!!

A golem was trying to hit a Killing Machine by striking it with its big arm. On the other hand, the Killing Machine pulled a saber-like sword and jumped to the golem. And then...

「Eh!? 」

I saw an unexpected sight right in front of my eyes!

The Killing Machine, that jumped to attack the golem, was joined by a horde of other Killing Machines. They attacked the golem like hyenas trying to prey on a slow-moving herbivore!

Although the golem had an outstanding physical strength and resistance, it was apparent that the golem couldn't survive unscathed from the attacks coming at the front, back, left and right sides. Then, the saber-like swords slashed the golem's legs and arms, and the golem fell to the ground. Eventually, the core of its heart was destroyed. The golem lost its vitality and became mere fallen rocks.

「He...Hey! They are being destroyed! 」

Both John Dae and I were stunned. Such sight was being repeated everywhere. Of course, some the golems' attacks hit and killed some of the Killing Machines as well. However, the Killing Machines' attack strategy was much more powerful than the golem's attack strategy.

This harsh reality made me want to close my eyes.

A vibration and roar echoed far away from a different lookout tower! A soldier from that tower reported to us in a loud screaming voice!

「Part of the northern wall got damaged! The Killing Machines have managed to get through the wall! 」

「It...It can't be!! They breeched the wall that quickly!? 」

「The golems are being overpowered as well! 」

...The Great Iron Wall was being easily destroyed!!

John Dae gritted his teeth.

「What a killing force...! This is the true power of the Imperial Machine Corps...! 」

By...By this rate, the second and third walls will be destroyed as well! If that happens, the Imperial Machine Corps will be invading Tarmine for real! The people will be slaughtered!

I was in panic. Nevertheless...The moment when the Killing Machines tried to get through the hole of the damaged second wall...

roaring sound

We heard a tremendous sound that even shook the earth! When I looked closer at the breeched wall, I saw that a dirt haze spread from the breeched area!

「Eh!? 」

Neither John Dae nor I knew what happened. The guard tower soldiers were also confused as well. Meanwhile, the hero murmured with an unsurprising voice.

「...It's a pitfall. I created it between the first and second walls. 」

When I looked at Seiya, I noticed that he already stretched one of his arms towards the northern area of the walls.

「Repair Iron Wall... 」

As soon as he professed those words, the breeched walls that were damaged by the Killing Machines were repaired in an instant!

「The...The Imperial Machine Corps became divided when the walls got repaired! 」

Just as the soldier said, hundreds of Killing Machines that fell on the pitfall were separated from the other units after the walls were restored. Suddenly, that huge pitfall closed and became flat ground once again. Seiya's trap made it possible to bury a third of the Killing Machines alive. Yet, John Dae's face was still serious-looking.

「Even if you restore the walls, they can only stand unscathed temporarily! They will break the restored walls as well and breach in again!」

Just as John Dae pointed out, the Killing Machines behind the outer wall continued to attack relentlessly. They tried to break the wall again. However...This time the wall wasn't destroyed!

「But...But...Why? The wall was easy to break through moments ago, am I right? 」

I was perplexed and asked Seiya what was happening.

「The walls they've broke through were made of brittle material. Now they're back to its original hardness.」

「AH!? Why on earth did you do that!? 」

Seiya didn't answer me. Instead, he started to walk and went to the spiral stairs to get down from the lookout tower.

「Seiya!? Wait!! Where are you going!? 」

「This is finished for today. 」

「Finished for today!? There are still Killing Machines beyond the wall!! 」

「No problem. 」

The Killing Machines, who sensed that it was impossible to make a hole in the restored wall, piled up like a mountain and tried to reach the top of the wall...However, they couldn't climb it because the wall was leaned over towards the outside. And then, the golems chased the obsessed Killing Machines that tried to find a way to climb the wall.

「Eh...!! 」

I was surprised once again. The golems, that were inferior against the Killing Machines, were overpowering them this time! They tried to destroy the golems by acting like carnivore hyenas! Nonetheless, the golems shook their arms to get the Killing Machines out of their bodies, and immediately smashed them on the ground with their fearsome strength!

「This is the true power of the golems. They will soon "clean" everything up. 」

Both John Dae and I were puzzled by all these occurrences. John Dae rushed on Seiya's direction and grabbed his shoulder, as Seiya tried to leave the tower.

「He...Hey! Explain it! I don't know what the hell is happening at all! 」

...Seiya hid the golem's true power, and made the walls fragile at first. Then, he let the Killing Machines break the first walls, but created a pitfall to eliminate them. And then, he regenerated the walls once again...It was certainly confusing and I didn't know about anything anymore!

「Just explain all of what happened just now! What the hell did you do? 」

John Dae asked persistently about what happened. Then, Seiya responded to him in an annoying manner as if it was troublesome to answer.

「I made it all happen because I wanted to secure our victory by any means. Therefore, I will analyze and study the Killing Machines I've captured in the pitfall. That's all.」

Chapter 82: Analysis and Discovery

John Dae followed Seiya, who rushed out of town.

John Dae complained after walking to him midway.

「Usually, analysis and studies are for formidable enemies. But, the golems were overpowering the Killing Machines at the end. Why bother to study them now...?」

Seiya didn't answer. Instead, he just touched his nose.

「Get away from me. You stink like a rotten zombie. 」

「Ugh!! 」

Ah, he spoke harshly as always. Well, of course John Dae smelled like a rotten zombie because he was an actual zombie. But, it couldn't be helped though. Then, Seiya stared at me with a disgusted face.

「You go away too. You smell like a zombie. 」

「I'm not a zombie, you know!? 」

...Both John Dae and I stared at Seiya with very dissatisfied faces. We walked a little bit away from Seiya. Soon, we reached the huge wall that surrounded Tarmine. This was the innermost wall of the five-layered wall.

In front of the rock wall...

「...Cave Along. 」

Seiya dived into the underground. Since John Dae and I were in close proximity with him, we ended up diving in as well.

「...Wha...What is this place? 」

John Dae raised his voice in surprised when he saw the inside cave made by Cave Along. Seiya brightened the place, which looked around 5 meters radius, with magical stones. Then, he proceeded to walk further ahead.

...But, why did he used Cave Along in a place like this?

I wondered confusingly about it. Then, Seiya stopped walking and approached the mud wall in front of him. On that moment, he touched the wall with his hand.

「Clear Wall. 」

Before long, the muddy wall became transparent like glass. And, when I saw the scenario that unfolded right in front of my eyes...

screams

I was so startled that I shouted aloud. It was because the Killing Machines appeared in front of me abruptly!

Beyond the transparent wall was a huge cave, bigger than the cave we were at. There were hundreds of Killing Machines in there.

「Are these the Killing Machines that fell on that pitfall!? Is this all right!? Won't they attack us!?!」

「This wall has the same properties of Clear Ceiling that I used before to see above the ground. We can see them like a transparent glass, but they won't see us because on the other side they can only see sand. Besides, this wall is two meters thick. It won't be easy to breach it.」

While explaining, Seiya began to insert a few earth snakes in the four corners of the cave where we were standing.

「Wha...What are you doing? 」

「I installed special earth snakes in this cave. Now we will be able to hear the sound of the other cave. Moreover, it will be able to cover both low and high frequencies. That means it will produce a realistic three-dimensional sound. 」

I...I wondered if such functions really existed before...! He always did strange things on situations like these...!

Then, Seiya took an earth snake from this chest and put it on his mouth...

「Ah. Ah. Ah. 」

He practiced as if he were holding a microphone. Then, the Killing Machines on the cave next door began to move in distress. Apparently, Seiya's voice transmitted to the other side.

robotic sound

bigger robotic sound

The Killing Machines started to roar! It was a very unpleasant sound!

「Ah, silence. Silence. 」

continuously robotic sound

After that, the Killing Machines just roared furiously no matter what Seiya said to them.

「Se...Seiya!! Can't you hear them only roaring!?'s 』

「Yeah. Apparently, they don't understand the human language. It seems that creating a sound transmitter makes no sense. 』

After finding out that he couldn't communicate with them, Seiya began to stare fixedly at the Killing Machines. Perhaps, he was seeing their ability value. I tried to activate my clairvoyance ability as well.

Killing Machine

Level – 20

HP – 138954

MP – 0

Attack – 85121

Defense – 98654

Agility – 85742

Resistance – Lightning, Fire, Water, Ice, Earth, Light, Darkness, Poison, Paralysis, Curse, Instant Death, Sleep, Abnormal Condition

Special skills – Evil God Protection (Lv MAX)

Skills – Evil Laser

I wondered if the status of the beast men serving the Grand Lion were somewhat lower in comparison. In fact, it wasn't a great enemy for Seiya. They didn't pose that much of a treat. The only problem was their numbers. There were hundreds of them.

「I caught many Killing Machines as test subjects...It seems that their stats are the same.』

Just as Seiya said, the Killing Machines in front of us were completely the same as if they were copy pasted. They had the same physical strength, attack power and defense power.

「By the way, Seiya. What are the golems' stats? I tried to use my clairvoyance ability on them, but I couldn't see anything at all. Why is that?』

「The golems have their stats camouflaged. Well, let's just say that they're capable of outperforming the Killing Machines in all aspects.』

「So, why do you need to analyze them if your golems are far superior? 』

John Dae looked mystified, then...

「...It's for the future. 」

After the short answer, Seiya began to analyze the Killing Machines meticulously.

「They have water and lightening resistance even though they're machines. Interesting. Maybe I should add attributes to my golems that are their weak points...Hmm.」

Seiya took out a paper and a pen. He took notes on it with a focused expression on his face.

John Dae looked at this situation with amazement.

「A...A hero taking notes. Are you really a hero? Aren't you a scholar instead...? 」

Actually, Seiya did look like a research professor...

「Let's put one of them in a "private room" to analyze it. I need more details. 」

Seiya put his hand on the next muddy wall. The walls moved inside and, before we knew it, Seiya managed to isolate a single Killing Machine in a different but smaller cave.

Then, Seiya snapped his finger and many earth snakes fell from the top of the cave.

robotic sound

The Killing Machine reacted immediately. It slashed some of the earth snakes with the saber-like sword. On that instant, the Killing Machine emitted a ray from its face and burnt the remaining earth snakes.

「I see. Now it used the skill named "Evil Laser". It looks like it absorbs the magical power into its eye and attacks others using it with a light ray. So, it was this skill that created the first breach on the wall.」

Seiya snapped his finger again. Then, the feet of the Killing Machine raised up. A golem emerged from the soil.

This time it wasn't like the earth snake. The golem held down the violent Killing Machine and slammed it with his fist by using a tremendous power...

「So, a head destruction is the only way to stop their vitality. It seems that there's no sign of regeneration even after some time has passed.」

The Killing Machine deactivated permanently. Nevertheless, John Dae looked at Seiya with infuriating eyes. After all, Seiya kept staring at the broken Killing Machine endlessly.

「Hey, how long will you keep staring at it! It's not going to activate anymore! 」

「No. It might resurrect and attack the moment I let my guard down. 」

「But, Seiya! There wasn't any "regenerate" skills in their stats, am I right? 」

「The status is only for reference. I can't rest assured until I've seen it with my own eyes.」

...He was finally convinced after staring at it for thirty minutes. Seiya finally stopped taking notes...Then, he snapped his finger again. On this moment, a burning flame fell over at the head of the deactivated Killing Machine.

「It seems to have a strong resistance to fire...Will it burn if I try a bit harder? 」

「I...I don't understand what the hell are you trying to do!! Why do you want to burn a broken machine!?!」

Seiya ignored John Dae's remarks. This hero looked like a mad scientist who continued to analyze and experiment on the useless robotic junk. Then, he said 「Let's add water after this. 」 . We just stopped talking to Seiya, because it was pointless.

—

...After about thirty minutes had passed. Seiya stopped taking notes.

「Okay. I don't need to analyze it anymore. 」

「It's finally over! So, what are you going to do with the remaining Killing Machines? 」

「I don't need them. I will destroy them now. 」

「Then, are you going there to fight them yourself? Or, are you going to create multiple golems inside of that cave? 」

「No. I'll clean it up faster than that. 」

Seiya snapped his finger once again. At that moment, a huge rock with a diameter of one meter fell from the top of the cave where the Killing Machines were gathered.

「Wha...What's that!? 」

Goggling eyes! A ripped mouth! There was a face on that huge rock!

「I didn't create just golems. In fact, I successfully created other rock-based monsters as well. The "Bakudan Rock"* was created from the combination between the destruction technique and earth magic. The reason why I trapped a large number of Killing Machines in the pitfall wasn't only for the sake of analysis. I wanted to test the power of this monster as well.」

an uproar of robotic sound

Suddenly, the Killing Machines charged all at once to the rock monster that descended from the top of the cave. But, on this occasion...

bang

A dazzling flash and a large roar occurred! A large thick wall separated that cave from the one we were staying at! Even so, I still felt the huge impact!

When my eyes stared again at the large cave in front of us, I realized that some of the Killing Machines became dismembered because of that rock monster attack.

「Did...Did it self-destruct!? 」

「That's right. It will explode if it senses a certain number of attacks. And...the power is just what I expected it to be. Dozens of bodies were shattered in an instant.」

A new Bakudan Rock fell from the top of the cave. The surviving Killing Machines attacked the rock all at once. As soon as the huge rock received some damage, a new explosion burst immediately!

The Killing Machines didn't have high intelligence. They didn't seem to understand the properties of that rock, "I'll self-destruct if you attack". Even though their fellow comrades were blown away, they continued to attack the newer rock that exploded as well.

「If I succeed in creating a larger rock in diameter, then it will be possible to achieve a wider range of explosions. However, if I make the rock too big, it will explode along with Tarmine.」

「Hey!! You can't be serious!! 」

John Dae was enraged at the hero's words. Yes...Well, no wonder he was angry with Seiya.

Eventually, only half of the Killing Machines remained in the end. Seiya suspended the dropping of the explosive rocks in the meantime. He took a paper and wrote a few more notes on it.

「You...You are analyzing them again...! 」

Finally, John Dae laid down on the muddy floor of the cave.

「I don't care anymore!! I'm going to sleep!! 」

—

...I wondered how much time has passed since then. I could only hear the sound of John Dae's deep sleep and the sound of Seiya's pen. I had nothing to do. Therefore, I just stared at the cave where the Killing Machines were trapped.

...Huh. What was that?

I noticed some irregularity by coincidence. One of the Killing Machines vibrated its body at the corner of the large cave. It looked as if it were trembling with fear.

I shook the shoulders of a sleeping John Dae.

「...Hmm? Ah...Is it finally over? 」

「No, not yet. 」

「You're kidding, right!? He's still going at it!? That man is seriously sick!! 」

「Mo...More importantly. Just look over there! That Killing Machine is a bit weird, isn't it? 」

John Dae glanced at the Killing Machine that I was pointing to.

「Indeed. That behavior is somewhat strange, but...Well, perhaps it broke when it fell from the pitfall? That might be the aftershock.」

John Dae didn't show much interest in it. But, I was curious. So, I activated my clairvoyance ability to check the condition of that Killing Machine.

Killing Machine

Level – 20

HP – 138954 / 138954

MP – 0

Attack – 85121

Defense – 98654 ...

...Wrong. It didn't lose its vitality. It's not broken either. Then, just why?

At that time. Unexpectedly, I noticed some abnormality on its ability value.

The following words were written at the end of the status.

『Personality – Friendly 』

Ehhhh!! That...That Killing Machine has...a "personality"!?

Chapter 83: Weird Machine

「Hey, Seiya! That Killing Machine is different from the others! It has a personality! It says it is “Friendly”!」

「Hmm... 」

Seiya, who had been taking notes while looking at the remnants of the broken Killing Machines, started to gaze silently at the “Friendly” Killing Machine.

「It seems that that Killing Machine is the only one with personality. 」

「What does that mean? 」

「If the same machine was produced in large quantities at a factory, then there’s a high chance that one of them could be fabricated with defects. Perhaps, that’s what happened with that one over there.」

Then, Seiya changed his gaze towards the broken Killing Machines and began to take a few more notes.

...What!? That’s all!?

I thought that it was unusual for Seiya to ignore it. But, if I thought carefully about it, it made sense. Seiya was collecting useful information for battle. He probably saw that Killing Machine as a “Good-for-Nothing”. That’s why he wasn’t that interested on it.

Before long, Seiya put the pen away.

「Okay. I’ve concluded my analysis. 」

「It’s finally over!! 」

John Dae showed an expression that seemed as if he were extremely happy from the bottom of his heart.

「Yeah. Let’s finish this by cleaning everything up. 」

At Seiya’s signal, a large number of Bakudan Rocks fell from the top of the cave where the remaining Killing Machines were standing still.

The Killing Machines attacked the Bakudan Rocks immediately. There were countless of big explosions inside of that large cave.

Meanwhile. My gaze was directed towards the Killing Machine that trembled incessantly on the corner of the cave.

「Seiya...That Killing Machine is still trembling... 」

「So what? 」

「Well, I mean...Don't you feel sorry for it? 」

「Feel sorry for a magical weapon? 」

「...Well. 」

Both Seiya and John Dae stared at me with a half-amazed face. Even so, the Killing Machine, which took refuge on the corner of the cave, seemed like a small child frightened by war.

Although Seiya looked uninterested and bored at first, he stared again at that Killing Machine and...

「I see. A "magical weapon with a personality". Well, it might turn out to be a valuable sample. I'll isolate it just in case, so it doesn't get destroyed...」

The trembling Killing Machine disappeared from the spot after a hole appeared in the ground. Then, the Killing Machine was ejected into a small cave next door. At the same time, the Bakudan Rocks blasted the remaining Killing Machines all at once. It was a very narrow escape.

In a small, isolated cave, the trembling Killing Machine looked confused without knowing what to do. However, one of the Bakudan Rocks fell from above and the Killing Machine became so startled that jumped to ground out of fear. I was surprised.

「A Bakudan Rock!? Why!? Didn't you say it was a valuable sample!? 」

「It's an experiment. It won't attack the rock if it has advanced intelligence. 」

We stared at the two "monsters" for a short moment. But, the Killing Machine just trembled and didn't attack.

「Seiya. That Killing Machine won't attack because it's "friendly". 」

「Is that really so? 」

Seiya snapped his finger. Then, surprisingly, the Bakudan Rock began to laugh with a distorted mouth.

「Hey, you...! Why don't you attack me? 」

I was astonished by the rock who spoke in a loud voice.

「It spoke!? That Bakudan Rock really spoke just now!! 」

「It's a kind of rock that I've created to taunt opponents into attacking who hesitate to attack.」

I immediately understood what Seiya meant by those words. The Bakudan Rock continued to speak with a freaky smile.

「Hey! Just do it, you piece of junk! You won't do anything useful just by standing still, you freaking idiot! C'mon! I told you to do it! It's useless if you don't do anything at all! Geez, you blockhead!」

John Dae pressed his fists next to me.

「Wha...What's wrong with that rock guy...! 」

「Yes, it's definitely annoying! Too annoying! It makes us want to punch it hard...! 」

After that, the Bakudan Rock continued to speak annoyingly by repeating swear words and dancing irritatingly around the Killing Machine.

Just when John Dae and I were furious and gritting our teeth towards that rock...

「I...can't... 」

I heard something else. It was not the voice of the Bakudan Rock.

The next moment...

「I can't do it!! 」

A high-pitched voice that resembled a girl's voice echoed in the small cave!

...It...It can't be...! No, I wasn't imagining things! No doubt about it! This voice was coming from the Killing Machine...!

「Oh. So, there was a type that could speak. 」

The Bakudan Rock disappeared into the ground when Seiya snapped his finger.

The Killing Machine was left alone in the small cave. Seiya put an earth snake on his mouth instead of a real microphone.

「Hey, you. 」

Seiya's voice echoed on the small cave. The Killing Machine spoke the human language while looking at its surroundings with confusion.

「He...Hello. 」

This magical weapon had a girly voice that didn't match its appearance.

「Why didn't you attack that Bakudan Rock? 」

「Because...it will explode if I attacked it...Besides...I don't want to attack anybody... 」

The Killing Machine began to speak more openly with us.

「Today, I...I was told to “kill human beings”. But, to be honest, I can’t do that terrible act against living creatures...」

...It...It really was a “friendly” type...! What a weird magical weapon...!

This machine looked the same as the other Killing Machines. But, when I heard an innocent voice, I thought it was rather cute.

Nonetheless, Seiya didn’t seem interested on such a thing. He asked what he wanted to hear.

「Are there other Killing Machines that can speak like you? 」

「No...No. Actually, none except Father... 」

「Father? 」

「Ah, our Father is the Machine Emperor Oxelio. Nobody can’t speak except him...Do you want to ask me why am I the only one who speaks among the other machines?」

「I don’t care. 」

「...Sorry. 」

The Killing Machine looked down as if it were sad. Then, it immediately lifted its head and spoke in a bold manner.

「But, I’m so happy that I got to talk with you now! No matter how much I spoke before, all of the other Killing Machines just made robotic sounds in response! That’s why I am extremely happy that I’m finally talking with someone!」

「Shup up. Talk about your Machine Emperor Oxelio if you want to speak that much. 」

「Ye...Yes. Sorry. I’m truly sorry... 」

...So...So, cold-hearted!! I didn’t know which of them was the machine anymore...!!

「Father looks like, well, let’s see, he has four arms and four legs, and... 」

After that, Seiya continued to ask many things to the Killing Machine. But, he didn’t manage to extract much useful information. After a while, Seiya spoke with a bored expression.

「That’s enough. I don’t have any more questions. 」

「...I’m sorry I couldn’t help you more. 」

Seiya took the earth snake microphone away from his mouth.

I was watching the Killing Machine that was left alone in that small cave. Then, when I saw that some Death Earthworms were suddenly peeking out from the ground...

screams

It yelled and panicked at the same time. Somehow, it was a funny scene that resembled that of little girls getting chased by bugs.

However, Seiya was staring at the Killing Machine with unfavorable eyes.

「That machine is suspicious. Perhaps, that machine is an assassin ordered by the Machine Emperor Oxelio?」

「A...Assassin? That friendly type? 」

「Yes. Maybe that machine is trying to fool us by pretending its stupid. 」

「But...But, how? You know, the Bakudan Rock would've destroyed it by now if I didn't notice it by chance.」

「...Hmm. 」

Seiya thought for a brief moment...

「Anyway, it's better to avoid any hassle. I don't want to feel worried, so I'm going to dismantle it now.」

「Eh!? You can't be serious!! 」

I shook John Dae's shoulders.

「Hey, John Dae! Please, say something! 」

「Well, you see. I don't have any objection to dismantle it. After all, the Demon King was the one that created that monster.」

「I'm sure that some monsters are good no matter how devilish the Demon King is. 」

「I wonder about that. I've seen many beast men in Tarmine, but none of them were decent.」

「What!! John Dae, but you're not a "bad monster" yourself, aren't you!? 」

「No!! I'm not a monster in the first place!! 」

I shouted at an indignant John Dae.

「Seiya! Don't break it apart! If you're worried about it, why don't you wrap earth snakes around its body just as you did with John Dae!」

「Why are you referring my name!! 」

「John Dae is an undead monster that might lose its mind entirely! If you had to choose between them, then that machine would be safer for us! Just look at him! John Dae is about to lose his reason at any moment now!」

「I'm not going to lose it!! Damn it!! This goddess is insanely annoying!!」

We were arguing too much...

「You're noisy. I understand. So, just be quiet. 」

Seiya took a deep breath.

「...Okay. I'll wrap that machine with earth snakes for the time being. 」

I felt relieved when I heard those words, and slightly touched my chest. Yet, Seiya had a very harsh expression on his face.

「I'll just keep it as a rare sample. But, I'll dismantle it straightway if I sense any strange movements.」

「...O...Okay. 」

Upon Seiya's signal, a large number of earth snakes appeared in the cave where the Killing Machine was isolated.

As soon as the machine saw them...

screams incessantly

The Killing Machine screamed aloud. Still, the earth snakes didn't stop moving, and wrapped around the neck and limbs of the Killing Machine.

「Sna...Snakes are crawling on my body!? Ple...Ple...Please!! Somebody, help me!! 」

The Killing Machine panicked and started to run in circles. It looked pitiful and sad. Still, Seiya gave further instructions.

「For safety measures, I commanded an earth snake to cover the eye of the Evil Laser. 」

The Killing Machine cried and fainted in agony when an earth snake wrapped around its face.

「Po...Poor thing...! 」

I took the earth snake microphone from Seiya's hand.

「Hey, can you listen!? It's all right!! If you keep quiet, those snakes won't harm you!! 」

「Re...Re...Really...? Are...Are you sure...? 」

Seiya stared at us with icy eyes.

「Hey, Lista. Let's go. There's no need to waste our time on something useless like this. We, humans in Tarmine, defended the town successfully by destroying the first unit of the Imperial Machine Corps. This information must've been leaked by now. Therefore, a second unit might arrive here much sooner than later to show their real fighting strength. We have to prepare and be ready when they come.」

「Ho...How contradictory of you to say that...! You spend so much time analyzing these Killing Machines...!」

「Analysis is important and extremely necessary for a strategical point of view. Yours is just a child's play, isn't it?」

「I don't consider this as a play ... 」

Then, John Dae interrupted our conversation.

「We have to prepared, you say? What are you planning to do? 」

「I have to focus on our defense against attacks from the sky. 」

...Seiya seemed to be wary of the magical weapons from the flying-type, but I wondered if such thing really existed in this world. I asked the Killing Machine.

「Listen. Is there a Killing Machine that flies in the sky? 」

「I...I've never seen one before... 」

「Lista. It's useless to listen. That machine doesn't have much information. Besides, the words that come out of its mouth aren't always the truth.」

「Seiya, then why did you ask it some questions a while ago!? 」

「Well, listening to it won't hurt. Anyways, the enemy might attack us from the sky. So, we should take it as countermeasure. If we succeed with a perfect plan, then we won't have a blind spot on the five-layered Iron Wall.」

「Ex...Excuse me... 」

Suddenly, I heard the Killing Machine's voice. Seiya spoke on the earth snake microphone with a slightly interested face.

「What's wrong? Did you remember something useful? 」

「No...That's not it...Ugh...! The...These earth snakes are frightening...I'm so scared...Ah...! 」

Seiya wrinkled between his eyebrows.

「Okay. Let me give you one piece of advice. "Just shut the hell up". That's all. 」

「Ugh...! *cries* 」

「Hey!! Weren't you too harsh!? 」

I spoke with the crying Killing Machine from the earth snake microphone.

「Calm down! It's all right! So, don't cry! 」

While I comforted it, I noticed that Seiya made muddy stairs with earth magic on the cave. He began to climb those stairs to the surface.

「There's no point in being here anymore. 」

John Dae followed Seiya as well. I tried to follow him too. However, I stopped midway because of the constant sobbing of the Killing Machine.

「Seiya...Sorry, but can I stay here a little longer? I want to talk with this child until it calms down...」

「Ridiculous. Do whatever you want. 」

Seiya, who went ahead with a disgusted face, looked back with a stern face.

「Don't use the portal to enter that thing's cave. Do you get it? 」

「Of...Of course, I get it! I won't do anything like that! Absolutely! 」

「This time, no matter what happens, I'm 120% sure that I won't be able to save you and you'll die in vain.」

「You don't have to specify it like that!! 」

And then...Seiya and John Dae left to the surface. Only the friendly Killing Machine and I were left behind in the underground.

Chapter 84: Dialogue

The cave was filled with the high-pitched voice of the crying Killing Machine. I spoke to the Killing Machine using the earth snake microphone.

「Hey. Can you hear me? 」

「Ugh, Agh...Ah, Ye...Yes! 」

「I am Listarte. You can call me Lista. Do you have a name? 」

「No, I don't. 」

「Okay, let's see...You sound like a girl. Then, what about "Kiriko"? I could call you "Kiri"!* It's a good name!」

On this instant...

cries aloud

The crying was getting louder and louder by the minute.

「So...Sorry!! You dislike that name, right!? I just said "Kiriko" because it's an easy way to remember since it's an abbreviated form of Killing Machine!!」

「Ugh...That's not it...! I...I am so happy...! 」

「Eh? 」

「Because I never thought I'd have a name for myself...! It feels like a dream...! 」

Tha...Thank goodness! "She" seemed to be pleased with the name!

I told Kiriko to rest assured because those earth snakes around her body were harmless.

「...Okay. I have to go now. 」

「Miss Lista. You're leaving already? I'm so lonely...Ugh... 」

She was going to cry again!! Hmm...What should I do...

「Kiri! Wait a second! 」

When I left the cave, I opened the portal that led to the Flower Garden of the God's realm.

The Goddess of Earth was wearing a straw hat under the beautiful sky without clouds...Mariya, the ONEE deity, was watering some flowers with a water pot.

「Ah, excuse me, Lady Mariya. Hello... 」

This was the first time I've met with Mariya since the incident where Seiya buried her in the muddy ground and stepped on her head.

「Oh my. Hello there. 」

Mariya greeted me with a robust male voice. It seemed that she didn't care to hide her secret from me anymore. But, when I saw Mariya's face, I became even more surprised. There was a blue beard growing on her face. It looked as if she didn't take care of her skin lately.

Mariya laughed slightly when she saw how stunned my eyes were.

「Rumors about me have spread since then. The other gods found out that I was an ONEE deity. I didn't tell them myself, but somehow, it feels kinda strange and refreshing that all of them know about me now. That's why I don't resent Seiya cutie anymore.」

「Is...Is that so! I'm glad for you! 」

「Well, if I have the chance, I'd like to dig him from behind. 」

「Didn't you just say that you don't resent him anymore!?...By...By the way, Lady Mariya! I have a request to make...」

I pointed to the cute pink flowers that I spotted early on.

「Can I have those flowers? 」

「Oh my. That's totally fine. I'll put them on a beautiful and grand flowerpot so that it would be easy to carry them with pride.」

「No, please...Just give them to me on a normal flowerpot...! 」

—

After I received the flowers from Mariya, I went back to the cave where Kiriko was isolated.

「...Ugh. Ugh. 」

I could hear her sobs from all over the cave.

「Kiri? 」

「Ah! Miss Lista! 」

I invoked the portal on the muddy wall to make a connection between my place and the cave where Kiriko was standing still. I just opened the portal's door a little bit and...

「Here! 」

I closed the portal immediately after throwing the flowers I've got from the God's realm.

「Ah. Excuse me. Miss Lista? But, did the flowers just fly here with a great speed...? 」

That's right. This was the only way to give the flowers to Kiriko without going through the portal.

I spoke through the earth snake microphone.

「Kiri! Those flowers are for you! 」

「For...For me? 」

「Yes! They're beautiful, aren't they? 」

「Ye...Yes! Extremely beautiful! And...I felt relieved to speak to you again! 」

「Okay. So, you won't cry anymore? 」

「Yes! I'll do my best! 」

I heard Kiriko's voice from afar when I tried to leave the cave with the earth snake microphone.

「Miss Lista...Will you come to see me again? 」

「Yeah! Of course! 」

I responded to Kiriko with a smile.

—

The next day.

After I saw the whole area of Tarmine full of golems, I asked Seiya the following.

「It seems that the scenery didn't change that much from yesterdays. How many golems did you create so far?」

I waited for a while, but there was no reply.

「...Seiya? 」

This hero was always quiet and secretive. But, today, Seiya was quieter than usual. I stared closely at him and I noticed that he was staring at a single point in the distance. He looked like a firm statue as if he didn't have a beating heart. It was obviously strange.

「Hey, Seiya! 」

I shook his shoulders. Still, he didn't answer me.

「Hey!? Are you okay!? 」

I became increasingly worried. Therefore, I shook his shoulders violently.

cracking sound

...I heard a dry sound as if something broke. On this moment, Seiya's lower arm came off from his shoulder!

「*screams* I...I got your arm!? I...I'm truly sorry!!!!!! 」

I heard Seiya's voice from afar while I was apologizing non-stop for breaking his arm.

「...What are you doing? 」

「Ah, Seiya!! You know, Seiya, I just touched Seiya's arm and it suddenly fell from your shoulder...What...Ehhhhhh!? 」

I became utterly confused to see two Seiyas, one that looked at me with piercing eyes, and the other one that I broke the arm.

「That's my Shadow Warrior**. I created a muddy doll with earth magic. 」

「Ah...Is that so. I see. But, a Shadow Warrior!? Why do you need such a thing!? 」

「I can't have a peaceful mind just because I'm in Tarmine. There might be people lurking around waiting for an opportunity to slice my neck.」

「Seiya, do you mean that the citizens of Tarmine might want to attack you!? The...There's no way that...」

...“they'll attack you.” That's what I wanted to say. But, I couldn't. I've seen many times how people here had a grudge against Seiya for not saving this world before.

「My biggest enemy may not be the Demon King, but rather a human being. 」

「That's a big overstatement you know...! 」

At that time, a merchant-looking man came from behind Seiya's back with a smile. This man carried a huge luggage with him and held medicinal herbs on one of his hands.

Seiya, who noticed the shadowy presence, looked back at a tremendous speed, and grabbed that man's chest.

「What!? 」

「Hey, you. Are you a thug? 」

「I...I'm not! I'm just a merchant! 」

「Who hired you? 」

「No...No one hired me! I just wondered if you'll take these medicinal herbs... 」

It seemed that Seiya didn't believe that man's words at all. I tried to stand between them, and Seiya finally took his hand away from that man.

「Listen. Don't sneak behind my back ever again. Next time...I'll kill you. 」

「What kind of hero are you!! 」

I yelled at the hero who looked like a hitman. The merchant was just a mere merchant. Poor man, he immediately ran away while crying aloud.

After the outrage, Seiya walked away as if nothing happened at all.

「Hey, wait a moment! Where are you going? 」

「I'm going to a lookout tower. I originally wanted to go straightaway, but my time was delayed considerably because I've met you on the way there.」

「Tower? Why...Ah...C'mon! Wait for me! 」

I followed Seiya, who headed for the lookout tower. The Queen and John Dae were at the top of tower.

「Why did you call us to come to this place? 」

John Dae asked that question with a suspicious look. Apparently, Seiya called them in advance.

However, without answering, Seiya held his hands to the sky in silence. Then, he muttered the following words.

「...Iron Dome. 」

Then, a huge roar coming from the earth was heard everywhere. The Great Iron Wall, that surrounded Tarmine, began to extend towards the sky! After stretching for a while, the wall bent inward and changed its shape! It covered Tarmine like an umbrella!

「*everybody shouts* Wha...Wha...Wha...What!! 」

John Dae and I were taken aback with amazement. The walls extended from all directions in the sky. Soon, the sunlight was completely blocked by this dome.

Seiya spoke amidst the dark space.

「The walls will transform into a dome during air raids. It consumes my MP, but this method can completely prevent attacks from the sky.」

「You can't do this without explaining to us first! It's suddenly dark and the people are screaming!」

「That's why I called you here. I want you to inform the people of Tarmine about this. They don't need to panic when they see the dome during air raids. They can rest assured.」

Eventually, a rumbling sound was heard from above. It seemed that the dome was reverting and we gradually saw the blue sky once again. The stretched wall gradually shrunk back and returned to its original position.

「I will revert it back like this once the danger is gone. 」

「We...We don't even know if the enemy really has a flying type. Why prepare this much for an air raid that won't happen...right?」

John Dae whispered in indignation. But, the Queen just smiled.

「Well, better something than nothing. At least, everyone in Tarmine will be safe, right?」

After the Queen professed those words, Seiya walked away and opened the door of the room in the lookout tower. This was the room where the Queen was held prisoner before. I noticed that several buckets of water were lined up inside.

「Se...Seiya. What now? 」

When Seiya snapped his finger, the water reflected different sceneries from the landscape.

「The images that my earth snakes see are usually projected to my eyes. However, I thought of a way of allowing everybody to see what's going on through the various places of Tarmine.」

Camera...The people on this world wouldn't know about this. But, in fact, this was like a "surveillance camera". With this, we were going to see the movement of the Imperial Machine Corps just like Seiya did once before.

...An iron wall that transformed into a dome during an air raid.

...Multiple surveillance cameras installed around the perimeter of Tarmine.

Tarmine became a high-tech fortress.

「Lista. Open the portal. I'm heading to Galvano right now. 」

「What are you going to do in Galvano? 」

「I expected that the second enemy would come here immediately. But, it seems that we still have some time. Therefore, I want to take advantage of the remaining free time to create in Galvano a similar degree of protection that I made in Tarmine...」

—

The following day.

Seiya went back and forth vigorously between Galvano and Tarmine to strengthen the defense mechanisms. At first, John Dae went to see the situation, but he got bored. So, he stopped accompanying Seiya on this quest. He remained by the Queen's side in Tarmine afterwards.

I had free time to spend in Tarmine after I invoked the portal for Seiya to go to Galvano. I thought that he wouldn't want me to tag along with him based on his mood. So, I didn't go.

In my spare time, I spoke with the Queen. And then, I went to see how Kiriko was faring in the cave.

「*laughs*...The story of Mister Seiya is very interesting! 」

「You can laugh by hearing this story. But, you would get tired immediately if you were near him, you know?」

I spoke with Kiriko through the earth snake microphone. Even though she didn't know who Seiya was, Kiriko laughed happily when she heard that Seiya made a dome to prepare against an attack from the sky.

Suddenly, I realized something and asked Kiriko the following.

「But, this talk sounds complicated for the both of us, right? After all, Kiri's dad is the Machine Emperor Oxelio...」

「Ye...Yes. It would be ideal if my Father and Mister Hero were to become friends through some discussion.」

It was obvious that a peaceful relationship between a hero and a monster would be impossible to achieve. I changed the topic because my feelings became messy somehow.

「So, how about the flowers? 」

「Well...you see, they're not feeling very well. 」

Kiriko took the flowers from a small pot and showed them to me from the wall between our caves. The flowers were wilting and the soil was dry.

「Ah!! Water!! I forgot to give you some water!! 」

「Water...? Does that mean that they don't have enough nutrition? Then, how about I give them some of my machine oil?」

「No! They will wither 100% with oil! Wait a second! I'll bring you some water now! 」

I hurriedly went back to the surface and I pumped water out of a well in Tarmine. I put the water on a bucket and rushed to the cave. I invoked the portal and entered Kiriko's cave. Then, I immediately poured some water on the flowerpot. The soil was thirsty for some water that it absorbed it in a blink of an eye.

「Whoa...! I feel relieved now! 」

Then, I heard Kiriko's voice behind me.

「Miss...Lista... 」

And, I noticed what happened just now! I entered Kiriko's cave even though Seiya forbid me to enter!

...I...I did it!! Oh my god!! Seiya told me not to enter!! But, I entered the cave by impulse!! I didn't even realized it!

「I finally...meet you face to face...Miss...Lista... 」

「Ki...Kiri? It can't be...! You're kidding, right...? 」

However, it was not Kiriko's usual voice. Kiriko approached me and stretched her robotic arm on my direction.

「Ple...Please...Don't!! 」

I felt eminent danger, so I screamed extremely high. Nonetheless...Kiriko took my hand and waved up and down in a very exciting manner. She spoke with a vigorous voice.

「I meet Miss Lista for the first time! I am impressed! 」

「Eh... 」

「You're wonderful! Your hair and face are so beautiful! I wished I could be like you! 」

「Is...Is that so? 」

Tha...Thank goodness! I knew that this child was not a bad monster!

「...But, it seems that the flowers aren't energetic yet. 」

The flowers were still wilting even though I poured some water on them. I wondered if I were too late.

「Wait. I'll try to save them myself. 」

I activated my healing powers to save the flowers. I tried to heal them by placing my hand on them as if I were curing an injured person.

Eventually...the dying flowers rose up and gained vitality.

「They're fine now! 」

...But, actually, I did my best to cure mere wilted flowers. Seiya would call me a fool if he knew about this...

Although my heart was conflicted, Kiriko was excited that she even waved her arms repeatedly.

「It's amazing! Miss Lista, it's a miracle! 」

「No, well. You know, I'm a goddess after all. 」

「Goddesses are amazing! How delightful! It's too great! 」

It's has been a long time since I was praised this much. I felt like I was going to ascend to heaven myself.

「Yes! That's right! I'm greater than Seiya, you know! 」

「Miss Lista! I respect you! 」

Ah...What a great feeling! Yes, that's correct! I was a goddess that could perform miracles!

When I regained my dignity as a goddess...

ringing phone

The earth snake microphone that I put on my chest began to ring.

「Mi...Miss Lista!? What's that!? 」

「Ah, this is an earth snake microphone. Kiri, be quiet for a moment. 」

I put the snakes' tail to my ears and the head onto my mouth.

「Hello, Seiya? Are you in Galvano? Or did you return to Tarmine by now? 」

I heard a low voice from the earth snake microphone-turned phone.

『...Did you use the portal to enter the cave with the Killing Machine? 』

「Ehhhhh!?! Ho...How do you know about that!?! 」

『All of your actions are so predictable. 』

Seiya began to reprimand me without stopping. I kept bowing my head in apology.

「I'm really sorry...But, I wasn't attacked...Ah...Yes...I know that's not the problem here...I'm sorry...It's just as you say...Yes...I'll keep it in mind from now on...No, this time I really mean it...Eh...Yes...I'm sorry...You told me that before...Yes...I'm truly sorry...Yes...Okay...Excuse me...Yes...Bye...」

After the earth snake phone call was over...

「Mi...Miss Lista...Are you okay? 」

Somehow, I managed to show her thumbs up. However, my fingers were shaking, my face was pale white, and my magnificence of a goddess had completely disappeared.

Chapter 85: Crisis

「...Your hero is a bit scary, isn't he? 」

Kiriko whispered to me, who looked extremely overwhelmed by what happened between the hero and me.

「Ah, well. Actually, most human beings have a little bit of benevolence towards other people. But, this hero is special. I would dare to say that he is a bit abnormal...」

On this precise moment, the earth snake microphone rang again.

「Mi...Miss Lista! He is calling you again! 」

「What!? Did he hear what I just said about him!? This is bad! My breasts are going to get crushed and milked out!」

「Are heroes supposed to do that!? 」

ringing phone

The earth snake microphone turned into a mobile phone, and kept ringing without stopping. I answered the phone against my will.

「You see, I didn't mean to describe you in that way...Well, it's true that you do have a sense of abnormality, but...」

『What are you talking about? More importantly, the surveillance earth snakes scattered around Tarmine have found the location of Imperial Machine Crops.』

「Ehh!! The...The second regiment!? 」

『That's right. I want you to come immediately to the lookout tower. Bring that Killing Machine with you.』

「To take Kiri with me, you say!? ...but why, Seiya!? Hello!? 」

Kiriko stared at me astonished, as Seiya turned off the phone abruptly.

「Excuse me...But, it's really okay for me to go outside? 」

「Ye...Yes. It seems so. But, there will be a commotion once the people of Tarmine notice your presence. I want you to be close to me. So, don't leave my side, okay?」

I didn't understand Seiya's intention for bringing Kiriko along with me. But, I did as he told me to do, so I took Kiriko and went to the lookout tower.

—

「...Ki...Killing Machine!? 」

I opened the portal and arrived at the top of the lookout tower. Once the soldiers saw that I brought Kiriko with me, they took an offensive stance against her.

Then, Seiya spoke to the soldiers.

「Don't worry. This thing is like John Dae. It has several deadly earth snakes wrapped around its body. So, that means that its actions are limited in the same way like John Dae. It won't harm us because his functions incapacitated.」

All of the soldiers expressed a relieved look on their faces upon hearing Seiya's reassuring words...All except John Dae.

「Just like me! The same way as me! Why do you keep mentioning my name, hey!! 」

After shouting aloud, John Dae stared fixedly at Kiriko.

「So, why did you bring that Killing Machine over here? 」

「That thing is a "functional robot". It might be useful for future negotiations. 」

I was perplexed by Seiya's words.

「"Functional Robot"! Like a hostage!? Seiya!! Don't tell me that this was the reason why you didn't break Kiri apart!?」

「Well, the opponent is a magical weapon. They won't accept nor understand the process of a negotiation. Still, I don't plan to carry any sort of negotiations with the enemy either.」

Hmm!? He didn't intend to negotiate with the enemy, and yet, he took Kiriko as a hostage!? I...I didn't understand the meaning of this at all...!!

I thought deeply about it, but I still didn't understand Seiya's intentions. Therefore, I decided not to think too much about it.

Seiya went to the surveillance room in the lookout tower and used the earth snakes cameras to look at the current position of the Imperial Machine Corps.

「All right. It's time to activate the Iron Dome. 」

The new regiment of Killing Machines reflected on the earth snakes cameras seemed to be far away from Tarmine. Even so, Seiya decided to transform the wall into a dome. Then, he looked up at the multiple cameras as if he were preparing against airstrikes.

「There's roughly ten thousands of magical weapons marching in the northern area. 」

I noticed the movement of the Killing Machines, which were reflected in the surveillance cameras while Seiya watched them silently.

「Hey, Seiya. They're...not flying in the sky. 」

「Yeah. They're not flying, just marching. 」

「There's no flying type after all!! That dome is meaningless!! 」

John Dae yelled at Seiya. Yet, Seiya just responded in a calm manner.

「It has a meaning. It gives me a "peace of mind". Anyways, the battle between the Killing Machines and the golems are about to start in the northern area.」

When I looked closely at the images projected through the earth snakes cameras, I noticed that a huge horde of Killing Machines marched against the golems. On the other hand, the golems were considerable fewer than the Killing Machines. However, they weren't there to lose.

「How many golems did you use for this battle? 」

「There are about 8000 golems heading north. They're a little inferior in number. But, that doesn't pose as a problem.」

There was no lie on his words. A couple of Killing Machines were swept away after the golems stretched their arms slightly. I felt that one golem was the equivalent of three Killing Machines. The golems' power was overwhelming, and the Killing Machines couldn't even get close to the wall, so they stood far beyond the Fifth Wall.

We watched the northern battle video feed for a while. Nonetheless, before long, Seiya took his eyes away from the earth snakes cameras.

「The second regiment shall be annihilated in one hour. 」

...At that time, John Dae and I were extremely happy at Seiya's confident words, who seemed convinced of our victory.

buzzing sound

I could hear a strong vibrating sound coming from Seiya's chest. This earth snake had a different rhythm from the other earth snake turned mobile phone.

「What...! 」

Seiya, who had a relaxed expression on his face, changed his complexion dramatically.

「Se...Seiya!? What was that just now!? 」

「It's an alarm earth snake. It would alert me if the enemy approached the first wall... 」

「EH!! Isn't the first wall the inner wall that protects Tarmine directly!? Are you sure it's not mistaken!?!」

John Dae showed an anxious expression on his face, and quickly looked at the earth snakes video surveillance coming from the water bucket cameras. In the same way, I also checked the cameras of the western and eastern sides. Then, I checked the area around the northern wall as well. From what I've seen so far, the walls remained intact because they were being protected by the defensive golems.

「...The Southern area. 」

Seiya spoke in a lower voice. Then, I looked at the surveillance cameras from the south. But, like the other cameras, I didn't see any alarming state.

「The golems guarding the southern walls were not defeated yet!! There are no Killing Machines over there!! Why did your alarm rang in the first place!?!」

Then, Seiya spoke as he crushed all of our reasoning.

「Perhaps they dug an underground tunnel and passed through the vast area between the fifth wall and the second wall...」

「Not an attack from the sky, but from the underground!? In other words, did we underestimate them!?!」

「Of course, I also considered the possibility that the enemy could invade our stronghold if they drilled from the ground. Therefore, the Great Iron Wall stretched to the underground as well. In fact, the wall is 50 meters high that is visible to the naked eye, and 50 meters below the ground that are not visible to us. The total length of the wall is actually 100 meters long.」

「Do...Does that mean that they dived more than 50 meters underground to invade us!?!」

I heard the sound of Seiya gritting his teeth.

「Just as a precaution, I actually extended the underground of the last inner wall by twice the size of the normal length, but...」

Seiya was staring at the southern cameras that projected the area between the first wall and the second wall.

Soon after, John Dae and I gasped when we saw that Killing Machines appear from the ground as if they were mole rats.

The killing machines metallic body shined blue. Both arms were drills. It was a new type of Killing Machine.

「...Bad. This is bad. 」

Seiya began to walk around in order to think about what to do now. John Dae muttered to Seiya to reassure him.

「Bu...But, that's the farthest that they can get to! There should be no problem, since the enemy won't be able to cross the 100 meter wall under the ground!」

「That...That's right! It will be okay! 」

I agreed with John Dae's reasoning. Yet, Seiya said the following bitter words.

「This is no good. If they continue to break the hard underground around Tarmine by a depth of 50 meters below the ground, it will mean that...」

Suddenly, Seiya stared fixedly at the area around the first wall. More than a hundred new type of Killing Machines appeared on the ground and charged towards the first wall with their arm drills! The wall got damaged because of their continuous strikes! The exterior of the wall began to scrape off gradually!

「In addition to these new units that are planning to break the wall on the surface, there might be other units underground that are still excavating to reach the bottom of the 100-meter inner wall.」

「So, that means that they're trying to invade us from the surface and from below the ground at the same time...!」

John Dae couldn't take this anymore and walked over to Seiya with rage.

「This is different from what you told us!! "This method can completely prevent attacks from the sky"...That's what you said!!」

Seiya gazed at John Dae with fiery eyes.

「...Shut the hell up! 」

It was a rare occasion for Seiya to show off his feelings of anger. He seemed to be clearly irritated by this situation.

「Se...Seiya...! 」

When he noticed my gaze, Seiya took a deep breath and spoke with calmness.

「Well, it can't be helped now. 」

And then, Seiya snapped his finger. A violent rumbling shook our bodies, and the dome that covered the sky of Tarmine shrank back and disappeared before long.

「What did you do? 」

「I removed the walls from the fifth to the second wall. Only the first wall remains intact now. However, I put all of my magical powers on this last wall... The thickness was reinforced by five times. I also increased the depth of the wall by five times as well. I wanted to make it thicker and deeper, but unlike stretching the wall towards the sky, the ground is limited because of the hard soil.」

Like this, only one of the five-layered walls remained intact to protect Tarmine. It may have been a frustrating choice for Seiya. But, the thickness and length of the wall, which increased by five times more, prevented the enemy from making a frontal breakthrough with the arm drills. It also prevented a breakthrough from the underground. Somehow, the invasion of the Killing Machines quieted down and went into a suspension.

As soon as I became slightly relieved...

「Hey, wait! You can't enter here! The hero is busy now! 」

I heard a lot of noise near the stairs of the lookout tower.

「Wha...What on earth is happening over there!? 」

When I went to see who was making a ruckus at the stairs...

「There's something I need to tell the hero!! 」

I noticed that a strong warrior was shouting aloud while surrounded by the guards of the lookout tower. When I looked closely, I recognized that screaming warrior as the one who tried to help Seiya in the battle, but instead, he was instructed to do "farming work".

「Wha...What's wrong!? 」

The warrior softened his tone when he saw me.

「I noticed something peculiar when I was doing the farming work as I was told to do. 」

John Dae, Kiriko, and Seiya, who were in close proximity, listened to the warrior's story.

「Yesterday, it rained for a very short time. At that time, the golems in Tarmine stopped moving by crouching weirdly. This occurrence has been witnessed, not only by myself, but also by a large number of people in Tarmine.」

Seiya wrinkled between his eyebrows.

「In other words, are you implying that the "golems are vulnerable to water"? That's ridiculous. I already confirmed that the golems are water resistant.」

Still, the warrior reaffirmed.

「No, there's no mistake about it! The golems slowed down when the rainwater touched their bodies!」

「Rainwater...you say? 」

On that moment, Seiya looked seriously at me.

「"Not resistant to the rainwater that falls directly from the sky"...Lista. Does this monster characteristic exist?」

「Well...I guess that's not impossible to exist! Unlike well water or filtered water, rainwater that has just fallen from the sky contains many natural forces! It might be a different property altogether! So, it means that, even though those golems are water-resistant, they could be inflicted by rainwater...!」

The bad things seemed to overlap. Because, when I looked up, I saw that the sky was dark and cloudy. It looked like it was going to rain.

...If...If...It rains now...!!

Unexpectedly, a violent sound was heard and both Kiriko and I quivered our bodies incessantly. This noise was the sound coming from the table that Seiya kicked aggressively.

After showing his rage, Seiya returned to the room with the surveillance cameras, and began to look at them in a state of impatience. He moved his gaze furiously and bit his nails nervously. This was the first time I saw Seiya like this.

John Dae was silent for a while. But, eventually, he sighed and left the room. He began to give new instructions to the soldiers.

「Prepare yourselves for battle! And secure the protection of the royal palace!」

「Jo...John Dae!? 」

At this time, John Dae returned to his original face of a respected but fierce general.

「I overestimated him. I thought that his cautiousness was "carefulness backed by strength". However, in reality, it was quite the opposite. Actually, his strength is the "strength for being cautious". In other words, if his reliance on his over-prepared plan created by his overly cautious behavior breaks down, his spirit will also break down. And that's what happened here...」

After John Dae walked away from the surveillance room, I looked at Seiya's back.

...Seiya...!

...The painful and difficult battle continued in Exfolia. First, it was the Beast Emperor the Grand Lion that had an ability value higher than the Demon King. In addition, this time was the Machine Emperor Oxelio that was behind the scenes and commanded a large army of Killing Machines to invade the Tarmine Kingdom.

Seiya was extraordinarily cautious. We prepared so much in advance so that we could deal with every possible scenario. But, even so, he didn't possess the ability to predict the future. Human beings had limitations to foresee every possibility. Many things were impossible to predict, such as Mother Nature and unexpected events.

No matter how "unbelievably cautious" he was. This could be the limit of Ryuguuin Seiya.

Chapter 86: Driven into a Corner

「Is Mr. Seiya...going to be all right? 」

Outside of the surveillance room. Kiriko spoke to me with a worrying tone.

「Yes, he'll be okay! He seemed to be a little bit upset about this situation, but I'm sure that he'll find a way out! Seiya has a strong mentality after all!」

「Is that so! Then we don't have anything to worry about!」

I tried to reassure Kiriko with those words. But, in fact, the depths of my heart were in turmoil. Seiya was extremely annoyed. I'd never seen him like this before. Of course, I could understand why his feelings were painful. The Killing Machines were trying to crush the southern wall from the surface and, at the same time, they tried to dig the underground area...

「Kiri. Are you fine with this? Isn't it painful for you to see the Killing Machines getting destroyed by golems?」

「Ye...Yes. It is certainly painful. But, I also don't want humans to be attacked... 」

The friendly Killing Machine said those kind-hearted words to me. I didn't know what to say to Kiriko, therefore, I remained silent.

—

Later.

Seiya instructed half of the golems from northern wall to head towards the southern wall. But, that didn't seem to be a good idea. Once the golems gave their backs to the enemy to march south, the Killing Machines got this opportunity to strike back. These golems were attacked, forcing them to retreat. In addition, the new Killing Machines also drove the golems that were guarding the southern wall into a corner. These new opponents appeared from the underground with drills on both hands. The new type had a higher performance than the usual Killing Machines. That meant that their ability value were on par with that of the golems.

...Maybe it would be wiser to leave Seiya alone for a while. But, I couldn't hide my anxious feelings. Therefore, I couldn't ignore the fact that the enemy was overpowering us.

Anyway, I entered the surveillance room where Seiya was with Kiriko.

「How is it? Did you find a way to subdue the enemy? 」

Seiya didn't look at me at all. He just stared fixedly at the water buckets with the earth snakes surveillance cameras. Then, he just sighed.

「I'm going to move all of the golems closer to the wall, considering the fact that there's a high possibility that the enemy could break the wall or go through below the stronghold.」

「All of them. Even the golems that are protecting the town and the royal palace? 」

「That's right. Its defense will be weaker, but this is the only way to protect the people of Tarmine.」

「But...If the new Killing Machines are digging the underground, won't they cross the borders of the wall in order to invade the inside area? If they manage to crawl from the other side of the wall, they will probably go up to the royal palace...」

Seiya stared at me with a surprised face. After thinking for a while, Seiya nodded his head for several times and spoke with a whispering voice.

「I see. Yes, you're right. Completely right. It's just as you say. I have to think about a different plan.」

Then, he changed his gaze and began to look at the cameras once again. He bit his nails while he shook his hands tremendously.

...Seiya agreed with my reasoning at last...!

It seemed that he was mentally driven into a corner. Somehow, this situation made me sad and I left the room quietly.

I wondered if Seiya would have a plan for when the Imperial Machine Corps cross the wall to the other side. No...I must believe in him. He will have a plan for sure. In the meantime, I only prayed for Seiya's calm demeanor to return back.

The situation was looking bad from all sides, even the weather was against us. However, Kiriko, who was looking up at the sky from the top of the lookout tower, spoke in a bright voice.

「Miss Lista! It looks like it's going to be a sunny day after all! 」

When I looked above, I noticed that the cloudy sky that covered Tarmine was starting to clear up. For the time being, it seemed that the golems' state wouldn't weaken due to the rainwater side effects.

—

A few hours later.

Nothing much happened since then. I didn't know how was the state of the southern underground wall, but from what I was seeing from the earth snakes cameras it seemed difficult for the new Killing Machines to break through the thick wall at the surface. In the northern area, the golems were underpowered because of their decrease in number. But, soon, they recovered ground because their ability value was still higher than the status of the average Killing Machines.

The situation seemed to improve a little bit...

「...The enemy's movements are strange. 」

John Dae said that the current situation was somewhat suspicious. After giving some instructions to the soldiers in Tarmine, John Dae returned to the lookout tower and watched the enemy from the top.

「What do you mean by "strange"? 」

「It looks strange, because the Killing Machines from the northern area and the new type of the southern area didn't push forward with their offensive stances. It looks like they're standing by as if they are waiting for something...」

John Dae's anxiety soon became a reality.

I could see a huge cloud of smoke far away from the farthest tower. A large rumbling sound soon reached our ears.

「Wha...What was that!? 」

John Dae and I stared closely at the distant field of smoke that spread in the horizon.

「It can't be...! That is...! 」

My eyes, which had better vision than human beings, could see a large army of Killing Machines rushing over to Tarmine like a big tsunami. Moreover...

「The...They're coming from all directions! 」

I looked around upon hearing the soldier's words. It was exactly 360 degrees... The smoke that was coming at us surrounded Tarmine from all the directions. It was as if one giant creature was trying to swallow Tarmine. As they approached us, the rumbling sound gradually became a regular mechanical sound, and the figure of the Killing Machines as a completely giant horde became visible on everybody's eyes. Most of them were the average Killing Machines. But, some consisted of the new type. Their insane number startled me.

John Dae wiped the cold sweat from his hands.

「Ten thousand...No. They're much more than that...! They've been waiting for this reinforcement!」

「We won't be able to handle such a large number of Killing Machines! 」

「No! Collect all of the golems in Tarmine and use them for the battle to equal their numbers! It's dangerous, but we have no choice but to do it! We have to settle this down while we still have a sunny weather!」

「You...You're right... 」

John Dae had the same thoughts as Seiya. It seemed that he no longer opposed to that idea. The situation was so urgent after all.

The Killing Machines, that joined their new great army, began to confront the golems that guarded the wall. This could be a critical showdown between both parties. Even so, the Killing Machines didn't move forward.

「This...This time, what are they waiting for...? 」

Soon, a thundering roar pierced through my earlobes!

I shuddered when I looked up at the sky.

There were several geometrical patterns drawn in the sky over Tarmine!

「Magical circles...!? No way...!! 」

My ominous feeling was correct. After the magical circles shined, the clouds began to spread through the sunny sky. At the same time, heavy rain that resembled a tropical storm fell in Tarmine!

The golems' movements changed dramatically once the heavy rain hit their bodies. The golems slowed down and were swallowed by the large horde of Killing Machines just outside of the wall. The few golems inside the wall stopped moving and stood on one knee.

...But...Why!? How did the enemy find out about the golems' weakness!? The enemy knew that the golems were vulnerable to rainwater!! Why did that piece of information leaked to the outside of the wall that surrounded Tarmine!?

I didn't understand that. However, this was not a time to be worried about such a thing.

The Killing Machines attacked the weakened golems all at once. The slow-motion golems were defeated one after another. As they were destroyed, the golems' bodies scattered around in dust and returned to the soil of earth. When the golems' defense system collapsed, the Killing Machines rushed to the wall. The new type hit against the wall and began to drill it immediately.

John Dae moved sideways and walked in a hurry. He was going to the surveillance room where Seiya was staying.

「John Dae!? What are you going to do!? 」

「The situation hasn't improved even when all of golems went to guard the wall! Those golems are not going to protect Tarmine! Then, I'll go to the battlefield with the hero! We have no choice but to fight for ourselves! 」

「But...But, Seiya is not on a good mental state right now! 」

「I don't care! I'll bring him with me even if I have to drag him down! 」

「Ju...Just calm down for a second! 」

While arguing, John Dae, Kiriko and I went into the surveillance room like an avalanche.

...And, on this very moment. I doubted my own eyes.

I saw that Seiya sat on a chair with his legs crossed while drinking a cup of tea gracefully. John Dae trembled his body with rage upon seeing this sight.

「Yo...Yo...You...Why are you drinking tea at this crucial moment...!? 」

「Wait a minute, John Dae!! Seiya is trying to calm down his nerves... 」

「Hey, it's not the moment for a tea break!! We have a far more important job to do now!! C'mon!! Get ready!! Let's fight!!」

Nevertheless, Seiya was looking peacefully at the cup of tea.

「Tarmine's tea has a nice fragrance. I think it is quite similar to the Darjeeling tea from my world. Anyway, it tastes good.」

Seiya spoke in a relaxing tone. Then, he drank a bit of tea. On this instant, John Dae grabbed Seiya by force.

「Are you drunk because of a cup of tea!? The golems have weakened considerably because of the enemy's strategy!! There's no time to waste here!!」

「...You're a noisy guy. 」

splash

After Seiya got annoyed, and he spilled the tea on John Dae's face.

「You...You damn bastard!! What the hell do you think you're doing!! 」

「You stink like a rotten zombie. But, now, thanks to me, you'll be a "Darjeeling Zombie" with a nicer fragrance.」

「Who's the Darjeeling Zombieeeee!! I'll kill you, you damned hero!! 」

John Dae was extremely angry with Seiya. However, I wasn't paying attention to John Dae but to the arrogant hero that was cold-hearted like always.

Se...Seiya was finally back to normal!! Well, actually, I felt that his condition was normal again, but at the same time, I felt that something was off...Anyway, he was his usual self again!! What happened to him in order to calm down this much!?

Seiya completely ignored John Dae, and stared fixedly at one of the earth snakes cameras. There was a strange Killing Machine reflected on that water bucket. The physique was about three times more than that of an average Killing Machine. It had four arms and four legs. I saw a spider-like monster made of a robotic body...

「Father...! 」

Kiriko spoke in a loud voice.

...That...That was the Machine Emperor Oxelio...! The fact that the Emperor came here meant that this horde of Killing Machines were the last regiment of the Imperial Machine Corps! He came here personally to see his own victory! We've reached the climax!

「An earth snake that I've installed on the southern wall projected what you see on this camera. Your voice will be transmitted to the other side. Give it a try.」

After saying those words, Seiya gave an earth snake to Kiriko. Then, Kiriko held the earth snake mobile phone and slowly spoke to Oxelio.

「Fa...Father, can you hear me? 」

After a brief silence...

「...So, those humans captured a Killing Machine, huh. 」

Unlike Kiriko, Oxelio's harsh voice echoed in the surveillance room as the Machine Emperor was forced to speak the human language.

「I won't accept any negotiations involving you. I don't care if you're destroyed, 'cause I'll have plenty of others to substitute you.」

The Machine Emperor spoke in an extremely cold manner. Kiriko trembled her body slightly, but she gathered some courage to respond to her unsympathetic father.

「Co...Could you stop attacking these humans? 」

「What are you saying? I have no reason to stop this operation. At present, our army is overwhelmingly superior. I managed to invoke the magical circle for rain by using the magical tool given by the evil god with mottled-hair. I succeeded in weakening the golems. In addition, it won't take too long now to destroy the wall. The underground troops have reached the 250 meters in depth. They're about to pass through this long wall of five times deeper than it was before. The victory of our army is absolute.」

「I'm asking you, Father! I want you to stop these attacks! I don't want the Killing Machines to be destroyed nor do I want human beings to be attacked!」

「It's our mission to kill humans. 」

「Father...! 」

Oxelio didn't even listen to Kiriko's wishes. John Dae pointed to one of the images from the water buckets.

「Hey!! Look at that!! What he said was true!! The southern wall is about to collapse!! 」

Certainly, there was a crack on the wall made by one of those drills. Actually, this occurrence happened throughout the wall that surrounded Tarmine.

Still, Seiya spoke in a relaxed tone.

「Don't fret. I'm going to reinforce the wall now. 」

Apparently, Oxelio heard Seiya's words.

「If it were a partial damage, it would be possible to repair it. But, I bet that your magical powers have limitations. You won't be able to deal with several damages at the same time.」

Ugh!! The enemy had foreseen our actions!! What were you doing to do now, Seiya!?

However, Seiya snapped his finger and said it bluntly...

「Repair Iron Wall... 」

On that precise moment, my feet vibrated while an intense sound came from the ground!

「Seiya!! Did you fix the broken parts of the southern wall!? 」

「No. I repaired the whole wall besides the southern area. 」

「Re...Really!? So, that means that you have enough magical powers left!! 」

「I doubled the thickness of the wall and I increased its depth by multiplying twenty times more at the same time I repaired all of it. The depth is now at 2000 meters below the ground.」

「...Sorry? 」

I...I wondered if I heard him wrong.

「Excuse me...What did you just say? Can you tell me again? 」

「The reinforced wall is now 20 times thicker, and 2000 meters deeper. There won't even one ant at that depth.」

...Kiriko, John Dae and I looked at each other. After a short moment of silence...

「Ahhhhh!? 」

All of us screamed in unison.

「You...You said that the limit of the wall was around five times more than that of the usual thickness and depth!!」

「Besides!! If you had the powers to make it stronger, why didn't you do it sooner!? 」

「Wa...Wait a moment, please!! Everyone, look at that!! 」

Kiriko sounded alarmed as she pointed to several earth snakes cameras that showed the ground rising up and down.

「Don't tell me that's the enemy's new reinforcements!! 」

John Dae distorted his face. Yet, it wasn't the new Killing Machines that came out of the ground. It were Seiya's golems, whose bodies were twice the size of that of the Killing Machines, which raised up from the soil.

John Dae was surprised at Seiya's actions.

「You had golems under the ground!? When did you do that!? 」

「I hid them originally at the underground around Tarmine in case of an emergency. 」

Countless of golems appeared from the ground as if they were zombies crawling out of a graveyard.

「So many...!! How much did you create!? 」

「Around 30,000 golems. 」

「30,000 golems!? 」

「Well, actually there might be more out there. But, I made so much that I can't even sort out their real number.」

There was no lie in Seiya's words. All we could see from the cameras was an incredible number of golems raising up from the ground.

「The Machine Emperor thought that he surrounded Tarmine. But, right now, he is the one surrounded by these golems.」

Just when Seiya muttered about the outcome of his strategy, the magical circles were deployed in the sky above Tarmine once again.

「Oh...Oh, no!! Your golems will be neutralized by the rain no matter how much they are!! 」

A fierce rain poured down on the golems, soaking them with rainwater! Then, the golems that had rainwater all over their bodies...

「What...!? 」

They kept confronting the Killing Machines without slowing down! Rather, it looked like they released the power that they had saved up until now. Because, as far as I could see from the images reflected on the cameras, the golems began to act in full force! They were overpowering the new type of Killing Machines with ease!

「Wha...Wha...What's going on!? Rainwater was not their weakness!? 」

Seiya turned his eyes to John Dae who screamed aloud.

「My golems don't have any weaknesses. 」

Chapter 87: Secret Weapon (1)

Seiya took a sip from a cup of tea in the surveillance room and gazed at the image of the earth snakes cameras as if he was watching a painting.

「You...You only hardened the wall when the enemy drove you into a corner...You hid a golem army in the underground and used the rainwater as a pretense for weakness...What is the meaning of this?」

This hero was a super M* that enjoyed the feels of a life-and-death situation...While I was immersed on my thoughts; I realized that John Dae had a very serious expression on his face.

「Don't tell me that...! You did all of this on purpose to lure the enemy forces to Tarmine...?」

Seiya nodded positively to that question.

「That's right. In particular, the golems' supposed weakness. That was a great strategy because it proved to be a trigger to lure the enemy. That's why Oxelio appeared himself at last.」

Ehh!? Wait a second!! But, wasn't that a bit strange!?

「How did the enemy got his hands on that information!? Tarmine was surrounded by a huge wall!! Then, why!?」

At that moment. I realized a horrifying truth when I thought deeply to myself.

「It's just a hypothesis...But, does Tarmine have an intruder!? 」

I felt wary as I looked at my surroundings. But...But if that was the case, who in the world was the one who leaked information to the enemy!?

Suddenly, John Dae's eyes became sharp. He had a self-confident expression and his hand was touching his chin as if he knew the answer.

「If that's true, then the criminal can only be that thing over there. 」

John Dae pointed directly to Kiriko, who began to tremble upon hearing this accusation.

「Me...Me? I wouldn't...! 」

I got between John Dae and Kiriko to protect her.

「What are you talking about! Kiri wouldn't do such a thing! Don't you dare say words with prejudice and speculation, you zombie!...Am I right, Seiya?」

Nevertheless, Seiya shook his head.

「No. That Killing Machine's sensory organs are connected with Oxelio, just as my earth snakes are connected with me. In other words, Kiriko is his eyes and ears.」

「No...No way...!! 」

John Dae just nodded to Seiya's words, as he said 「I knew it! 」 . Then...

「So, when did you notice it? 」

「I already considered this possibility when I discovered this magical weapon. 」

I raised my voice and shouted extremely high.

「I was the one who found Kiri, you know!? Seiya!! You would've destroyed Kiri if I haven't noticed her behavior!!」

「I was the first one to discover that Killing Machine. But, I left it behind and waited until you noticed it. Actually, if I were the one to recognize it first, the enemy wouldn't be deceived anymore. Well, considering the fact that the enemy really had shared sensory organs with that Killing Machine. Therefore, I pretended it to be an accidental discovery.」

「Ho...How could you...! 」

「The fact that Kiriko was an intruder was only a guess at that time. But, at some point later, it turned into a certainty.」

「...When did that happen? 」

「When the dome covered Tarmine. Actually, when I analyzed the Killing Machines, I said aloud that they could be making new prototypes for the creation of a flying type. In other words, I thought that it was possible for them to manufacture a flying type in the future, or better, that they already completed creating them successfully. However, as soon as Tarmine was turned into a dome to cope with that type of attack, the enemy tried to invade us in the opposite direction by digging underground. At this time, I was convinced of the possibility that Kiriko was used as a secret device to learn about our strategies.」

I didn't want to believe that Kiriko was an inside intruder. Still, Seiya's story was pretty persuasive. I stared at Kiriko.

「Kiri...Is that true...? 」

「You...You're wrong! I didn't mean to... 」

Kiriko shook both hands as she denied it. But, next to me, John Dae drew his sword and took an offensive stance.

「...I'll destroy you here and now! 」

screams

Kiriko screamed with fear and hid behind me. She was trembling like a coward. I knew it. Kiriko wasn't a bad monster after all.

「Ple...Please stop it, John Dae! 」

「Hey!! Why the hell are you protecting the enemy!? 」

During this heated dispute...

splash

Tea splashed onto John Dae's face once again! John Dae stared at Seiya with a demonic face!

「You...Why did you throw that tea at me again!? 」

「It's because some time has passed since then and you've started to reek like a zombie. Even so, no matter how much tea you have on your body, it's still not enough. From now on, will you put the tea in a pot and carry it with you, okay?」

「Why do I have to carry the tea myself that it will be thrown on my head!! 」

Seiya sighed as he took a small breath.

「Anyways. Calm down a little. Kiriko mustn't be the only one to have sensory organs. If both Lista and I didn't notice Kiriko's presence, then Oxelio wouldn't be able to use her eyes and ears because I would've destroyed it entirely. It would be pointless to have only one Killing Machine with this ability. In other words, it's better to think that Oxelio can share sensory organs not only with Kiriko, but with all of the other Killing Machines.」

I looked at Kiriko's face with a serious expression.

「Kiri. You didn't know about this, did you? 」

「Yes! I didn't mean to eavesdrop on all of you! Please believe me! 」

Yet, John Dae still pointed his sword at Kiriko.

「Even so, there's no better option than to destroy it now! 」

「What!! She just said that she didn't mean to!! Why can't you monsters get along with each other!? 」

「Do...Don't you dare put me on that monster's sideeeee...eh, ah!? 」

John Dae, upon realizing that Seiya was holding a new cup of tea, reluctantly put the sword back on his sheath.

...Phew. I was glad that Kiriko wasn't destroyed in the end...Ah, what? Could it be that Seiya protected Kiri?

As a matter of fact, I didn't understand why Seiya would do such a thing. But, after this scene calmed down, Seiya spoke with a somber tone.

「Still, it was extremely difficult to pretend that I was depressed with myself because my strategy wasn't working that well. I've never experienced melancholic thoughts during my entire life.」

I...I'm depressed all the time...! So, he was upset because he had to do a little act in order to deceive Oxelio through Kiri! What an odd hero I've got here...!

However, now that I've realized that everything was Seiya's doing, my heart became bright again. In fact, the thick and deep wall created by Seiya made it impossible for the new type of Killing Machines to enter the Kingdom of Tarmine. Moreover, the Killing Machines that surrounded the walls, including those in the south with Oxelio, were surrounded by golems. Our situation changed from despair into our own advantage.

Nonetheless, on this instant. The earth snake camera where captured Oxelio's movements emitted a sound.

「I command the completion of our "Irregular" countermeasures... 」

I could hear Oxelio's military voice. Before long, a strong sound vibrated violently on my earlobes.

「Wha...What is this sound? 」

「I can hear it coming from the outside! 」

The sound became even louder once we got out of the surveillance room. When I looked at the sound's direction...I noticed that the northern sky was red.

It looked like a red cloud floating in the air. But...I was wrong. That red mist gradually approached us, and then, I saw that it were a flock of Killing Machines. Unlike the new types that dig the underground with a blue hue, these new Killing Machines had a red metallic body. Hundreds of units flew in the sky towards our stronghold!

「A flying type!? It really did exist!! 」

John Dae screamed extremely high at the sight of the new Killing Machines that jet rockets on their feet and gradually approached Tarmine for invasion. And yes...Seiya was right all along...as always.

Chapter 87: Secret Weapon (2)

The new type of flying Killing Machines moved towards Tarmine to invade us.

...Ugh! This enemy was also overly cautious! It had a flying army waiting for its command at a far-away distance!

Seiya prepared himself for a time like this! That's why he created a dome protection for Tarmine in the first place! However! After reinforcing the wall so much, Seiya didn't seem to have enough magical powers to create the dome now!

Even so, Seiya spoke the following words that betrayed my anxiety.

「Iron Dome. 」

The thick wall along the ground began to rumble and extended towards the heavens to form a dome! Actually, this transformation was so fast that it finished closing before the flying type arrived in Tarmine!

I shouted to Seiya after the whole place became pitch dark like a pan with a closed lid.

「Did...Did you still have some magical powers left!? 」

「Yeah. I did have some left. By the way, when I reinforced the wall my MP only decreased by 10 points. And now, my MP decreased by 5 points when I created the dome.」

「Isn't that too economical!? 」

Even though Seiya was using a super-advanced earth magic, only a tiny amount decreased from his MP as if a beginner was transforming a little bit of soil into a rock. While I admired his amazing qualities of an Earth Warrior, Seiya silently moved to the surveillance room. Everyone followed him in a hurry.

After entering the surveillance room, Seiya snapped his finger. Then, I could see from the earth snakes cameras that the ground around Tarmine deformed and rose up. I've seen those monsters before.

「Tha...That's the Bakudan Rock!! 」

The golems grabbed the Bakudan Rocks from the ground and threw them all the way up to the sky as if they were throwing balls! Naturally, their target were the flying type Killing Machines!

I was sure that it had a certain amount of power, but when some of the Bakudan Rocks thrown away by the golems landed against the rockets of the flying Killing Machines, a huge explosion burst in the air!

Meanwhile, other Bakudan Rocks thrown by the golems managed to avoid the assault by the bombardment of the flying troops and went straight against them. The effect was better this time around. The Bakudan Rocks' explosive power was so tremendous, that hitting just one Rock destroyed several of the Killing Machines in one go.

In just a few minutes, the flying Killing Machines were wiped out. In addition, the ground Killing Machines, including the new type for the underground, were surrounded by more than 30,000 golems. They were being destroyed rapidly.

—

Afterwards.

Seiya stared attentively at one of the earth snakes cameras that projected the sky...

「Good. The flying type seems to have been annihilated completely. Let's deactivate the dome for now.」

The dome shrunk back, and returned to its original form and height. Then, we got out of the surveillance room and we looked at the horizon by 360 degrees from the top of the lookout tower. As Seiya professed before, there were no more flying Killing Machines on the sky and, on the ground, the 30,000 golems had destroyed the remaining Killing Machines.

「I feel great when things go according to plan. 」

Seiya stared at the sky while drinking a cup of tea. John Dae shuddered all over his body upon hearing Seiya's words.

「You...You won against the Imperial Machine Corps while holding a cup of tea!? Is this how a hero fights against the enemy!?!」

「Who cares!! Our victory is what matters!! 」

I spoke to John Dae with a bright voice. Then, John Dae changed his complexion and had a cheerful expression on his face. That was natural. After all, our great victory was unbeatable.

Still, Seiya murmured in a way that destroyed our happiness.

「Well, none of this has ended yet even if my plan was successful. 」

「Eh? What does that mean? 」

Then, the soldiers in the lookout tower yelled extremely high.

「A...A giant Killing Machine appeared in the southern area!! 」

My whole body froze the moment I turned back!

「What on earth is that thing...!! 」

My eyes saw a huge Killing Machine that was about the height of the hardened wall!

「Since when did this monster got here!? 」

Upon seeing a super-giant monster that appeared so suddenly without making a sound, Kiriko spoke aloud.

「Fa...Father....!! 」

After Kiriko said "Father", we realized that it was certainly the Machine Emperor Oxelio because of the similar visual! However, his body total length was about 50 meters high!

「Kiri!! How did Oxelio become that huge!? 」

「I...I didn't know he could do such a thing!! 」

「This is bad!! He is going to destroy the southern wall!! 」

The wall was indeed thicker and deeper. But, when the gigantic Oxelio hit the wall with his fist, an earthquake-like vibration shook Tarmine violently!

John Dae shouted to Seiya while trying to endure the severe earthquake.

「What are you going to do now!! This scenario was really unexpected!! 」

「No. It's normal for robots to enlarge their bodies. Of course, I was expecting this outcome.」

「Is...Is that so!? 」

「Don't worry. I already prepared a secret weapon to go up against huge robotic enemies. 」

Then, Seiya stared fixedly at me.

「Lista. Open the portal. Let's go near Oxelio. I have to prepare one last thing before activating my secret weapon.」

「O...Okay! I understand! 」

「I nodded upon hearing his request. 」

...Seiya, who had been "locked" inside the wall, wanted to jump straight away into the battlefield by himself....!! Maybe he was utterly confident about his secret weapon....!?

—

Just as the hero told me to do, I opened the portal and connected the outside of the portal's door with the southern area of Tarmine. Soon after, Kiriko, John Dae, Seiya and I came out of the portal.

The area was full of wreckage from the destroyed Killing Machines. And then, just a few meters away from us, the gigantic Oxelio was hitting the wall with his fists. The golems were trying to attack the enemy at his feet, but they were crushed immediately like ants.

I tried to activate my clairvoyance ability while looking at the back of the gigantic Oxelio.

Gigantic Oxelio

Level – 99 (MAX)

HP – 3487570

MP – 42475

Attack – 794525

Defense – 788965

Agility – 587544

Magic – 85754

Potential – 999 (MAX)

Resistance – Fire, Water, Wind, Thunder, Ice, Earth, Light, Darkness, Poison, Paralysis, Curse, Instant Death, Sleep, Abnormal Condition

Special skills – Evil God Protection (Lv MAX), Remote Sensory Organ (Lv MAX), Deformation (Lv MAX)

Skills – CH Laser, All Destruction

Personality – Heartless

...Wha...What an incredible physical strength!! His health points were over 3,000,000!! This was another fearsome enemy that was more powerful than the data of the Demon King Artemaeus that Her Excellency Chronoa showed me before!!

In addition to the crazy status, I felt overwhelmed just by looking at the enemy's huge size. It was as if a giant building was moving on its own.

「So big...! Normal attacks won't inflict any damage on that thing! Are you sure that we can win against this crazy opponent!?!」

「No need to worry. I'll put my secret weapon on motion now. 」

Then, Seiya stepped his foot on the ground as if he were calling something over.

As soon as we heard the sound from Seiya's foot on the ground, a giant hand appeared from the area behind Oxelio, right up a few of meters away from us!

「Is...Is that the secret weapon...!? 」

After I was astonished for a moment, I spoke to Seiya with a smile afterwards.

「I got it, Seiya!! You created a huge golem to fight against the gigantic Oxelio...So, that's your real secret weapon, I see!!」

「No. It's a little different than that. 」

「...Eh? 」

Soon, I understood the meaning of Seiya's words when the huge giant rose completely from the ground.

...A white dress that was dirty because of the soil. Yet, it was familiar.

...A face that was also covered with dirt. Yet, the blonde hair was familiar. An appearance that I saw every morning at the mirror.

It was a "super-giant me" that even surpassed the gigantic Oxelio in height.

I was speechless at the sight that unfold in front of my eyes. Next to me, Seiya spoke with a serious expression his face.

「That's the secret weapon...It's called "Great Tarte". 」

Chapter 88: Irregular

We were a few meters away from the southern wall that protected Tarmine. As I looked up, my eyes saw that a gigantic Oxelio and a huge "Me" were facing each other for battle.

「Se...Seiya...!! Gre...Great Tarte...!? 」

「This large Tarte is a super-giant clay doll created by the full power of earth magic. 」

「No!! I mean, why did you create a clay doll that resembles me!? A golem would've been a better choice!!」

「It was impossible to create clay dolls with more than 50 meters tall with my magic alone. So, this time I used...」

I was astonished when I saw the object that Seiya took out of his pocket. It was a small golden doll made of hair. It got an unforgettable name...

「"Listahair Doll"! 」

Seiya created this doll for his synthesis by using my hair. I was utterly embarrassed by this whole scenario.

「I succeeded in creating this huge doll made of clay by using it as a catalyst. But, because of your hair, that huge doll got your appearance.」

I was very amazed in a bad way after I witnessed the creation of the huge clay doll "Great Tarte". It made me look ridiculous. However, this time, I was astonished at something completely different.

「So...Sorry...Seiya. But, I don't remember giving you my hair to create this Listahair Doll...!!」

During Geabrande's saving quest, Seiya had created several "balls" with my hair to keep it for his synthesis experiments. However, his actions got me into several weird and embarrassing moments. I still remember how Valkyrie, Mash and Elle were horrified by this way of creating new weapons, with remarks such as "creepy", "disgusting" and "seriously". I didn't want to experience that ever again. Therefore, Seiya didn't intend to use that method again and, since then, he never did it again. Or so I thought.

Seiya explained as if it were something completely normal.

「Yeah. I made it by peeling off your hair while you were sleeping. 」

「Yo...You...!! You did it again...!! 」

Rather than anger, I was blown away by extreme anxiety. The Listahair Doll was made entirely of my hair. I wondered nervously how much hair was needed to create it. So, I stroked my head slowly.

「Ahhhh!? The whirl of hair on the back of my head is considerably less!! 」

I yelled aloud. Yet, Seiya didn't change his usual bored face.

「You mustn't complain about it. After all, this is all for the sake of saving this world. 」

「Ugh....!! 」

I groaned furiously while gritting my teeth. I would like to shout and curse him "You stalker, give my hair back". But, as Seiya said, he wouldn't be able to complete the creation of a huge muddy doll to compete against Oxelio without my hair.

I took a deep breath to calm down my nerves. Then, I just stared at the "Great Tarte" while enduring my bitterness. I believed that...my hair wouldn't go to waste if in the end that huge "Me" could defeat the gigantic Oxelio...

—

The gigantic Oxelio got alarmed by the presence of the huge "Me" that appeared behind his back. However, he didn't move neither took an immediate offensive stance towards "Me". On the other hand, the Great Tarte put her arms in front of her chest in a fighting pose.

Then...Oxelio finally moved. He pulled one of his four arms and charged against the Great Tarte with his fist! I became astonished by his fast and nimble movements I never thought that a huge monster like him could move that fast!

bang

Oxelio's strong fist punched the face of the Great Tarte! On that precise moment, I heard something coming from the Great Tarte's mouth...

『Whew!! 』

An idiotic voice echoed throughout the whole land of Tarmine!

「Seiya!! Did the Great Tarte say "Whew" just now!? 」

「It can speak a few words just like the other dolls I've created before. 」

「Is...Is that so...But, my huge "Me" got beaten up, you know!? 」

「Don't fret. The durability is greater than a golem. It's perfectly fine even if it gets beaten up like that.」

However, Oxelio continued with his raid! He made use of his four arms to the fullest by hitting the Great Tarte repeatedly! He managed to invade the Great Tarte's defense and, with his fists, he hit her all over her body!

『Whew. 』

『Whoa. 』

『Ugh. 』

The Great Tarte kept screaming with a similar voice every time she was hit.

「Seiya!! This is getting quite messy, will she be all right!? 」

「It's fine. 」

Re...Really...!? Even so, my head hurt badly as if I were the one getting hit by the enemy...!!

It seemed that the Great Tarte was underpowered against the gigantic Oxelio. Nonetheless, before long, the huge "Me" counter attacked at the end of Oxelio's rushing hits! She used this timing to seize Oxelio by hugging him!

「Ohhh!? She fought back!! 」

Oxelio tried to escape from the squeezing arms of the Great Tarte. Despite that, the Great Tarte didn't release him and tightened up even more!

「A...Amazing...! She's winning against the gigantic Oxelio in power! 」

And so, the situation turned around...But, the moment I thought that we've got the advantage, I realized the horrifying scene that was about to unfold right in front of our eyes.

While the Great Tarte tried to grip Oxelio's body by using four different positions with her wings and limbs, the skirt of her dress rolled up and revealed her white pure panties!

「Ahhhh!! Her panties became visible for everyone to see!! 」

Seiya spoke as if he found me irritable.

「That doll isn't exactly you. So, you don't need to worry about it. 」

「Even if you say it like that, it doesn't erase the fact that that doll looks the same as me, even the damn panties...!!」

Yes, even the underwear! Those white panties were the same as the ones I wore every day! Why was this Great Tarte so realistically made after my image!

Suddenly, I noticed that John Dae put his hand on his chin and looked up attentively at the Great Tarte.

「Hmm...Oh, oh... 」

「Where the hell are you looking at, you erotic zombie!! 」

「Why...Why are you getting mad at me!? I'm just watching the battle!! 」

「Liar!! You were staring at my panties, weren't you!! 」

John Dae and I bickered with each other for a short moment. Meanwhile, Oxelio gained some power and managed to escape from the Great Tarte's wings and limbs. He managed to gain some distance from the Great Tarte.

Then, a robotic sound was heard as if a metallic door unlocked. Oxelio's abdomen "opened" up. I could see several booster holes from the inside of his body.

「Wha...What is that...? 」

Just when I questioned those holes, a high number of laser beams were released from a reactor towards the Great Tarte!

...I closed my eyes temporarily because of the strong dazzling light. Then, when I opened my eyelids, I almost collapse because of the shocking reveal.

The Great Tarte was still standing up even after the strong laser beams attacked her. Seiya was correct. The durability wasn't that ordinary to begin with. But...Due to the laser beams, the Great Tarte's hair became extremely messy! Some parts of her clothes were burnt and ripped apart!

「Seiyaaaaaa!! My hair is messy and I almost got no clothes on!! 」

However, what I was thinking was fundamentally different from what Seiya was thinking.

「Don't worry. The Great Tarte still has plenty of power. 」

「No!! That's not what I was talking about!! My...My breasts are...!! 」

My huge "Me's" breasts were popping out from the torn dress! The dress only hang on by a little piece! It was almost fully opened for the whole world to see!

「...Don't worry about it. 」

「How can I not worry about it!! My breasts are almost jumping out of the dress!! 」

「You're stubborn. I already told you before that that thing is not you. 」

"I am trying to say that my breasts have the same shape and visual as those of that huge Me"...That's what I wanted to say but I was too embarrassed to profess it out loud.

My body was overheated because of my inner shame. Then, I noticed that John Dae was scratching his nose next to me.

「Ah, ah, ah...! Almost, almost...! 」

「You bastard!! You're really looking at "Me" after all!! I'll smash your eyes, you scumbag!! 」

「Wha...What a foul mouth you have there!! Are you really a goddess!? 」

Again, while I was arguing with John Dae, Seiya became somewhat upset at the Great Tarte that battled against the enemy.

「I thought that doll could power up just like the golems even with that figure...Yet, I feel that her specs are lower than expected. Is it affected by the appearance, or has it deteriorated?」

「What do you mean by that!! 」

In addition to being humiliated, I was extremely infuriated by his rude remarks about myself. However, once Seiya spoke poorly about the battle progress, the Great Tarte made a puffy face. On that instant, the Great Tarte got an angry expression on her muddy face and roared so loud that even shook the floor.

『Geez...I'm angry now...!! 』

When I heard that noise, I was so startled that I shouted.

「Se...Seiya!! Did the Great Tarte just say that she was "angry"!? 」

「Yeah, she did. 」

Soon after, the Great Tarte looked at Oxelio with a serious expression while pointing her fists at him.

...Don't tell me...that's a special move!?

On that moment...

bang

Oxelio's fist smashed again on the cheek of the Great Tarte!

『Whew!! 』

The Great Tarte screamed like before! At the same time, I screamed at Seiya as well!

「Wasn't she going to attack with a special move!? What happened!? I thought that she said she was "angry"!!」

「She just spoke. That's all. The Great Tarte doesn't have any special moves. 」

「Then, does that mean that her line was meaningless!? 」

「I didn't create this doll with specific abilities. Except her behavior. However, that specification was created on her own will without my permission.」

Seiya was apparently dissatisfied with that aspect. He just sighed at the sight of it.

「It's hard to create the monsters you want. Sometimes anomalies happen, such as this irregular occurrence. And the same happened with that Killing Machine called Kiriko that speaks the human language.」

Seiya was pointing his fingertip to the battle zone. When I changed my gaze towards the place he was pointing at, I became extremely startled.

Unexpectedly, Kiriko ran to the area where Oxelio and the Great Tarte were fighting against each other.

「Ki...Kiri!? 」

I chased after her. Kiriko stopped at the foot of the Great Tarte, and from there, looked up at Oxelio and raised her high-pitched voice like a young girl.

「Father! Please, stop fighting! 」

Oxelio noticed Kiriko's presence from below and turned his eyes at her.

「The Killing Machine that understands the human language, huh. The Demon King said that I was the only type of my kind that could speak...」

Kiriko stood at the line of sight of Oxelio. Then, he began to direct a red light at her as if he wanted to eliminate her completely. There was no emotion nor attachment towards one of his "children".

「An irregular occurrence happened during the manufacturing progress. I don't need you because I have tens of thousands of others that can be my eyes and ears.」

「No...No way...!! Father...!! 」

It must've been very painful for Kiriko to hear those words. But, honestly, I was relieved to hear what he said.

...Because, after all, it was as Seiya guessed. Oxelio was able to share his sensory organs with all of the other Killing Machines besides Kiri!

Kiriko's espionage charges were completely cleared up. Nevertheless, Oxelio told Kiriko a very surprising but terrible fact afterwards.

「Who the hell are you calling "Father". Your true parents are dead. The real purpose of Killing Machines is deeper than you think. The Demon King didn't create them from scratch. The core of your powered robotic body moves because of your murdered human soul.」

Kiriko trembled her body greatly.

「Do...Do you mean that I was originally a human being...!? My real mother and father were human beings...And I...I already died once...!?」

I was in disbelief just like Kiriko.

...What on earth!! So, all the Killing Machines that Seiya defeated until now were...!!

Before I knew it, John Dae and Seiya were by my side. Oxelio's huge red eye moved directions from Kiriko towards Seiya.

「That's right, hero. More than 10,000 Killing Machines that you've destroyed like trash were indeed people who lived in this world.」

That fact took me by surprise, and both John Dae and I froze upon realizing the truth.

「It...It can't be...! 」

「Se...Seiya...! 」

I looked at my side to see how Seiya was reacting to this news because I worried about his mental health. However, this hero didn't change his complexion at all.

「Some sacrifices are necessary in order to save the world. I don't feel responsible for it.」

Oxelio emitted a voice that sounded just like a robot.

「I tried to shake your emotions...But, it seems that you resemble a machine just like us.」

On the contrary, Kiriko, who was supposed to be a machine, could not bear it anymore. She crouched on the ground because she couldn't endure her suffering.

「Kiri!! Are you all right!? 」

I ran over to Kiriko and held her back. Kiriko's iron back was cold, but in a way, it seemed more human than Seiya's.

Oxelio looked down on Seiya, who was holding the Platinum Sword without showing any feelings of hesitation.

「Even so, I never thought that you'd be capable of doing this much. Our army has been destroyed. But if I defeat you, there won't be any problem. My Demon King will be very pleased.」

Seiya snorted at the enemy.

「If I'm here, then that means that a victory won't be at 120% anymore. 」

「My calculations says otherwise. 」

The abdomen of Oxelio opened up and a piston peeped out of his reactor.

「CH Laser. 」

A black laser beam of a different color was launched towards Seiya. It was clear that the ominous light had the Chain Destruction that could extinguish the souls of both Seiya and I.

「Seiya!! 」

I shouted aloud. Yet, Seiya nodded calmly.

「Be my shield. Great Tarte. 」

『Ye...Yes! 』

As soon as I heard an idiotic voice, the Great Tarte stood in front of Seiya and us, with both of her hands widely open. The Great Tarte became like a huge wall that protected us.

「Is...Is she all right? Great Tarte...? 」

I was worried, so I spoke aloud naturally without even noticing it. Then, the Great Tarte reacted to my words and responded to me.

『It's okay, it's okay! I'm totally fine...! 』

I almost fainted when the Great Tarte looked at me with her thumbs up.

Because of the previous attack, the small piece of her dress that barely covered the chest was completely gone! The upper body was topless and the breasts were bare for everyone to see! She was half-naked!

「How could you be totally fine....!! 」

I approached John Dae in a hurry, grabbed his head with both hands and twisted his neck.

「Wha...Wha...Wha...What the hell are you doing!? You're almost breaking my neck!! 」

「Don't look!!!!!!!!!! I'll kill you if you do!! 」

John Dae screamed painfully while I continued to twist his undead neck.

「I...I didn't see anything!! I won't even try to look at it, so just stop it!! Mo...More importantly than that!! The hero...the hero has disappeared!! 」

「...Eh!? 」

My sanity returned when I heard that words. There was certainly no Seiya when I looked around.

「You're kidding, right!? He was right here next to us just moments ago!! Where is he!?」

I noticed what Oxelio tried to do behind the Great Tarte. The exit from the abdomen lightened up to shoot the next laser beam.

...Seiya, don't tell me that...Did we get away from the Great Tarte's guard!? Oh...Oh no!! This was extremely dangerous!! If that dark light touches us, both Seiya and I will die forever!!

Nonetheless. I heard a familiar voice on my ears before the dark light came out of Oxelio's abdomen.

「...State Berserk Phase 2nd. 」

The person who spoke was far, overhead. When I looked up to the sky, I saw that something moved at the top of the head from the Great Tarte's newly afro hair.

It was the mad hero engulfed in a red aura.

「Hey, you!! When did you get there!? 」

「"A perfect platform to deliver my attack against huge enemies"... This is the true usage of the Great Tarte.」

After declaring those words, Seiya launched his Platinum Sword at the head of Oxelio.

Chapter 89: Great Hope

I realized that my hair was only meant to be used as a “platform”. I felt increasingly salty upon knowing this reason that I wanted to attack the person who robbed the hair from the back of my head. However, the culprit who did it was not near me now.

...On the top of our heads. A sword wrapped in a crimson aura smashed against the head of Oxelio and broke the metallic armor that was probably harder than steel. In Exfolia, the hero couldn't use his flight skill. Yet, he used a “platform” to inflict damage on the enemy. His attack was so fast and accurate that it looked like he was floating in the air. My anger faded away after I witnessed the hero's brilliant attack.

Seiya, who finished the offensive strike, descended down and landed right next to me. At the same time, a violent crushing sound echoed around. Oxelio's head was destroyed and it looked like he stopped moving.

「A...Awesome! You did it! It's a fatal wound! 」

I also rejoiced upon hearing John Dae's optimistic voice. Oxelio's metallic head was destroyed at the front and the inside was exposed. The wires were damaged because they were on short-circuit, sparks burst everywhere.

It seemed that the battle was ending. Still, Oxelio was not a living creature. He was a machine. He shouldn't have any problem with operational movements even though he lost half of his head. On the next instant, Oxelio's abdominal area began to emit a strong light.

「Seiya!! A laser beam is coming!! 」

I screamed loudly because a laser was about to be launch. It could kill me and Seiya right then and now. But, as soon as the sound reached a climax, Oxelio's abdomen exploded. The gigantic machine collapsed to the ground and created a violent tremor.

「EH!? 」

I was extremely surprised by this outcome. Yet, Seiya spoke as if nothing much had happened.

「Earlier, before I smashed his head, I managed to insert an earth snake into the abdomen's reactor.」

「Do you mean that the explosion now was the work of an earth snake!? Did Oxelio fire his laser against himself accidentally!?」

「That's right. Even if he wanted to use that attack once more, it was a bad move from his part to leave the abdominal reactor open. So, I used that chance to go inside with my earth snake. But, I had to close the door of the reactor so that my plan would be successful. I mean, I went there and locked the door. Then, I pulled the door about thirty times to make sure it was really closed. And then, I went away.」

「Why did you certified it was closed for thirty times!? Are you sure you didn't break the door in the end!?!」

I thought that one or two times would've been enough. But, it didn't matter now. Half-broken head. Abdominal injury. This time, I thought that he had defeated Oxelio for real, but the cautious hero shook his head instead.

「It's not over yet. Go hide behind the Great Tarte. 」

「But...But, if the enemy took that much damage, then... 」

In the midst of my words, a broken Oxelio woke up. Seiya was right. Oxelio was still able to move. He spoke aloud as if he were chanting words repeatedly.

「Theoretical value...Speed...Foresightedness... 」

「Wha...What is he doing? 」

「Maybe he is analyzing me. 」

And then, Oxelio's eye shined brightly.

「Analysis...Complete... 」

Soon after, Oxelio's body suffered a dramatic change. Once I heard a robotic sound, his limbs disappeared as if they were sucked inside of the main upper body.

「Eh!? What the hell!? 」

Oxelio became like a turtle. I couldn't figure what his intention was. However, soon I noticed something peculiar. On the back of Oxelio, there was something similar like the reactor of the abdomen. It looked like a new place for the launch of his laser beams!

...No....No way...!!

「...CH Laser All Range. 」

His whole body was fixed on the ground! He deformed his body to become like a turret*! The gigantic Oxelio was ready to shoot a laser from his back! Along with a dazzling light, countless of lasers were launched like guided missiles! Those lasers tried to hit Seiya in twists and turns!

「State Berserk Phase 2.6...! 」

Seiya increased his Crazy Warrior state just like the same way when he won against the Grand Lion. On this very moment, Seiya's movements became like a red orbit. The laser beams couldn't catch Seiya amidst his supersonic movements, then fell upon the ground and burst as if they were like a pouring rain.

Even so, Oxelio didn't give up and kept launching his missile lasers without interruption. The whole scene became like a relentless series of attacks that only focused on the laser energy that he had to spare.

「You're continuing to dodge my lasers...But, it will be impossible for you to dodge them if they come from all over the place.」

Oxelio's ominous words echoed on our earlobes. Before long, the red orbit, that was clearly avoiding the lasers with zigzagging moves, finally stopped moving. When the figure of Seiya was visible to my eyes, I noticed that he became surrounded by countless of lasers coming from all directions.

「Se...Seiya!! 」

It seemed that the enemy calculated the perfect place for Seiya to land. It was as if he drove Seiya to that spot on purpose. Right now, the lasers were coming for Seiya from all directions. From his head, his sides and back. He was basically trapped now.

However, Seiya dashed forward. Seiya slashed his sword towards the lasers that approached him recklessly.

...Still, the lasers were not supposed to be cut with a sword. It looked like a disastrous attack was about to happen. Nevertheless! The moment that Seiya's sword hit the lasers, they changed trajectory immediately! The lasers went to Oxelio himself, and after it hit the enemy, a huge explosion burst aloud!

Like me, Oxelio wasn't able to fully grasp what really happened here.

「You bounced them back...How could you repel the destruction force of the CH Laser All Range after you've seen it for the first time...?」

「Although I'm seeing it for the first time, yours is just a modified version of the average Killing Machines' Evil Laser. I figured out that the Evil Laser could bounce back with the reflection of the Platinum Sword's blade upon analyzing it previously.」

...Re...Reflection...!! Did he find out about it after that long analysis on the Killing Machines!?

Once again, Seiya's movements became like a red orbit. Seiya moved around so fast that my eyes couldn't even see him. I wasn't sure because I didn't see much, but was he counterattacking the missile lasers? His counterattack proved to be accurate. Almost every laser reflected by Seiya returned to Oxelio. Then, Oxelio continued to bathe on his own lasers of destruction. Flames burst and a black smoke engulfed the enemy's body.

「Analysis inefficient...Analysis inefficient...Analysis...Ine...fficient... 」

And then, the light of Oxelio's eye slowly faded out.

Oxelio completely stopped operating. I activated my clairvoyance ability to focus on his physical strength only.

Gigantic Oxelio

Level – 99 (MAX)

HP – 28671 / 3487570

「Great! Seiya! Just a little bit more to finish him off! 」

I shouted at Seiya with a cheerful voice. Yet, Seiya's expression was still severe. Seiya stared fixedly at Oxelio with piercing eyes.

「No. I have to be extremely cautious from now on. There is a high risk that he'll try to involve me on his own explosion.」

「Ehh!! Oxelio is going to blow himself up!? 」

「Yeah. I saw it on TV back then on my original world. When robots are detained, they might switch a button of self-destruction.」

「Ah...Ah, but that...Are you basing your knowledge on a TV program...? 」

「I have evidence. I saw that he had a skill on his status called "All Destruction"...It's very likely that it's a self-destruction technique.」

「Ah...Actually, that may be true... 」

「Before he activates the self-destruction device, I'm going to clean it up with the Crimson Boom.」

When Seiya touched the ground with his toes, an earth snake appeared with two sheaths. Seiya wore both of them on his waist.

「Oxelio's body is supposed to have a self-destruction device. But, that worries me as well. I don't know if it will be ignited by the Crimson Boom's flames. Besides, there is an eminent danger that that might fire back to the one who ignited it, me. Therefore, I considered that the self-destruction device could only be activated by Oxelio's will. And if it does, it could counterbalance the flames of the Crimson Boom's explosion....」

After explaining his thoughts, Seiya approached Oxelio while trying to figure out if there was really a self-destruction device in the first place. In the distance, Oxelio, who had survived his own self-attack, was almost non-operational. However, the moment he noticed that Seiya was approaching him, his dead eye lit up red again.

「...Preparation for launch...Complete. 」

...!! Seiya was right!! He tried to do something to Seiya right now!! Wa...Was he going to self-destruct?!

However...

「I won't let you. 」

The hero, whose state transformed into the Crazy Warrior, was already close to Oxelio! Seiya held both of his sheaths with confidence! Then, he pulled out the swords from both of his sheath and directed the pointy blades towards the fallen gigantic Oxelio!

「Double Crimson Boom...! 」

The great technique that defeated the Grand Lion generated a bigger power and shock wave because of the dual sword style! The moment the strike was inflicted on Oxelio, his body began to squeeze dramatically!

Oxelio body created a massive explosion as if the core of the earth convulsed. Thankfully, the blast wave didn't reach us. Actually, immediately after releasing the Crimson Boom, Seiya deactivated his Crazy Warrior state and returned to being the Earth Magic Warrior once again...Or did he reverted at the same time of the Crimson Boom attack? Either way, Seiya managed to invoke a high rock wall in order to protect us from the insane blast.

After a while, Seiya released the rock wall.

「After the attack, I created the rock wall just as a precaution...But, it looks like there was no big explosion after all.」

We didn't really know if there was a self-destruction device inside of Oxelio's body. Just one thing was clear; the Double Crimson Boom made Oxelio into a complete wreckage. The cautious Seiya began to scatter the junk as if he doubted his own victory.

Then, Seiya approached the dismantled Oxelio and began to drop each debris to the underground by the power of the Endless Fall.

John Dae, who was silently watching the situation from nearby, opened his trembling lips and spoke to Seiya.

「You...You won against the Machine Emperor Oxelio without a single scratch on your body...!? Hey you...I can't believe you're that strong!! But, if you're strong, why didn't you fight in the battlefield since the beginning!? I'm sure that you'll win without any problems...!!」

「Of course. But, if I could win this fight without fighting the enemy myself, then that's better. Speaking of which, I thought it would be better for us to leave Oxelio to my golems and the Great Tarte. Well, actually, apart from the golems, the Great Tarte was only meant to be used as a platform.」

Somehow, I felt like I was being mocked. However, when I looked up, I saw that the Great Tarte had a big smile on her face. Yeah...Still with her chest fully exposed to us...

「Hey...Hey, Great Tarte!! Just hide your breasts with your hands, okay!? 」

『I don't mind it! It's no big deal! 』

「I'm not okay with it!! 」

After I yelled aloud, I stared fixedly at John Dae.

「Wha...What's wrong!! I told you I wasn't looking at her!! 」

After a while, the undead's expression transformed into the dignified face of a great general. He laughed a little then.

「Either way, this giant doll made of clay did its best to protect Tarmine. 」

I also agreed with John Dae, who was deeply moved.

「...You're right. 」

As a matter of fact, the Great Tarte didn't serve as a mere platform only. Who would've imagined that the hero would appear at the top of the Great Tarte's hair to strike against the Machine Emperor Oxelio? It was clear that the Great Tarte was the key to defeat Oxelio.

When I stared at the innocent Great Tarte that smiled earnestly while hiding her breasts with her hands, I laughed happily at her.

...You really did your best, Great Tarte!

While I was looking at the Great Tarte with warm feelings on my heart, Seiya pulled out his swords and pointed them towards the Great Tarte.

「All right. It's big and it's a hindrance. I'm going to destroy it now. 」

「No!! Wait a second, hey!! 」

I screamed back. Yet, Seiya didn't even look as if he cared much about her.

「Why? We're done here. I don't need the Great Tarte anymore. 」

「I'm telling you that you don't have to break her!! Don't you have any compassion for your creation!？」

「Compassion, you say? That thing is a clay doll with no will. 」

Seiya asked a question to the Great Tarte with an extremely cold gaze.

「You don't mind if I were to destroy you now, do you? 」

『Ye...Yes! 』

「You shouldn't be saying "Ye...Yes"!! Anyways!! Seiya, just stop it!! I don't want you to break a clay doll that looks exactly like me!!」

...Somehow, I managed to persuade Seiya to stop his intents of destroying his clay doll. Therefore, the Great Tarte was placed as a guard outside of Tarmine's wall. She was treated like a guard dog, but it was much better than being destroyed.

Then, I started to annoy Seiya to convince him to fix the Great Tarte's hair and clothes.

「This is too troublesome. You're making me do lots of unnecessary stuff. I have other things to focus on.」

「What other things? 」

「First, I have to collect the wreckage of the Killing Machines destroyed by the golems and drop that junk deep underground with the Endless Fall.」

The cleaning up as usual. But, this time he had a lot more cleaning to do as the consequence of the largescale war. Still, I had a different worry than his long cleaning plan.

「So...Sorry...But...Is everything okay? Seiya. 」

I asked that question nervously while staring at Seiya's complexion. After all, we were told by Oxelio that the Killing Machines were originally humans. At that time, Seiya pretended to be calm, but in reality, he was probably suffering on the inside.

Even so. Seiya had a bored expression on his face as usual.

「That junk exceeds ten thousand remains. It's a lot of hard work. But, I still have to do it. If I leave behind a Killing Machine that can move, it will attack humans again. Well, if I mobilize all the golems to help me, it shouldn't take too long to finish.」

He was only thinking about cleaning up. I was relieved to see that he was "okay", but at the same time, my heart felt convoluted because I wanted to say, "Where are your feelings as a human being" instead.

...Anyways. The hero went to clean up the remnants of the Killing Machines. Meanwhile, I approached John Dae.

「This will take some time. So, we should return to Tarmine in the meantime. 」

I summoned the portal to take us from outside the wall back into the lookout tower. However, John Dae was wary and stared suspiciously at Kiriko from afar.

「...Hey. What are you going to do about that thing? 」

「Are you talking about Kiri? Of course, I will take her with us. 」

After I said that, I turned my icy eyes on John Dae.

「John Dae! Don't tell me that you're still thinking about destroying Kiri! 」

「No...No. That thing's soul belongs to a human being, right? Then, that means that it's wrong to destroy it.」

「Then why are you staring at her with suspicion? 」

「I was thinking about that thing's future. Kiriko will have problems living among humans when she returns to Tarmine...」

I stared at Kiriko upon hearing John Dae's worrying words. She was a friendly Killing Machine that liked flowers. She was also a scaredy-cat. She might've been a young girl when she was a human being. And then, one day, the Demon King took her life away...

「Kiri... 」

I made a decision when I visualized Kiriko's life when she was a human being. I moved towards Kiriko from afar and shouted aloud.

「Kiri. Shall we go back to Tarmine together? 」

「Bu...But, I... 」

I put my hands on Kiriko's back and spoke with a bright voice.

「Listen, Kiri! Why don't you go on this adventure with us? 」

「Ehh!! An adventure with Mr. Seiya and Miss Lista, you say!? 」

Kiriko was extremely surprised. And so was John Dae, who screamed upon hearing my words.

「Hey, hey, are you serious...! 」

「Of course, I'm serious! I'm sure that Kiriko will not get hurt if she goes with us! 」

「Bu...But, are you sure that overly cautious hero will agree with this? 」

「I will convince him somehow! It will be fine! I will even "beg with a dogeza" if I have to! 」

「Don't you have any pride as a goddess!? 」

John Dae screamed aloud, but I kept talking to Kiriko.

「You know. To tell you the truth, I was a human being before I reincarnated as a goddess. 」

「Mi...Miss Lista was...a human before? 」

「That's right. That's why I think we have something in common, haven't we. 」

Then, I held Kiriko's hand.

「Let's go, Kiri! 」

After she hesitated for a second...

「Yes! 」

Kiriko finally gave me a cheerful reply.

—

We went through the portal and we arrived at one of Tarmine's lookout tower. When I reported our victory to the soldiers of the lookout tower, everyone rejoiced with their hands. The Queen, who had secured herself in the royal palace until now, came to the lookout tower to celebrate with us.

And then...Seiya came back after two hours.

I took a deep breath to suppress the insane speed of my heartbeat.

This hero was a cold-hearted hero after all. He didn't care that the Killing Machines were originally made by the souls of human beings. Moreover, he tried to get rid of the Great Tarte as soon as we were done with the enemy...

「Li...Listen, Seiya...You know...Can't we take Kiri with us on this saving quest?」

I was afraid. Yet, I let it slip anyways.

Chapter 90: New Comrades

Instead of saying “No” or “Okay”, Seiya just stared silently at my face. I felt uncomfortable because he was staring at me with an apathetic expression. I couldn’t read his emotions, therefore, I felt increasingly anxious... I felt an unpleasant sweat spread throughout my back.

...Please, c’mon!! Just say something!! Why was he making me feel so uncomfortable!?

On this moment, Kiriko, who was hiding behind me, took a step forward.

「Is it not possible!? I will try my best not to get in your way!! I...I want to go on an adventure with you two, and...you know...I want to become a lovely woman just like Miss Lista!!」

「Kiri....!! 」

Kiriko was shaking severely. She was extremely scared of Seiya. I perfectly knew how she felt. However, she shouted aloud to tell her inner feelings even though she was a scared little girl’s soul on a Killing Machine body. Her courage became the focus of my determination.

Yes. But, I wondered if I had enough courage to show him my true feelings...All right! Okay, I’ll do it! I’m going to activate my special attack now, the “Listarte Super Dogeza”!

「My lord Seiya!! I’d like to make a request, so please give me your approval... 」

However, the moment I got on all fours...

「...Fine. 」

My time stopped upon hearing Seiya’s response. After a while, I finally swallowed the reality of this situation.

「Ehhhhh!! That easy!? But, you once refused to take Elle and Mash with us during Geabrande’s quest, am I not right!?!」

「That machine might have been a human once before, but, right now, it’s a monster. Therefore, I can rest assured because I won’t need to worry about saving a monster. That’s why I’m allowing that thing to tag along with us.」

I was appalled to see that Seiya didn’t fret nor did he oppose to the idea of bringing Kiriko with us. Yet, Kiriko was beaming with joy as she moved her body happily.

「I’m so happy!! I will do my best!! 」

「Just carry my luggage for the time being. 」

「Yes! With pleasure! 」

Kiriko carried Seiya's luggage with such a delight. When I stared at the hero's bored face, I realized that he had this ulterior motive hiding from the beginning.

...Somehow, I felt that Seiya sympathized with Kiriko's situation. We wouldn't know what would happen to Kiriko if we let her be alone in Exfolia. Maybe that was the reason why Seiya decided to take Kiriko with us...Well, I wasn't really sure about his intentions. But, I wanted to believe he truly felt that way.

Soon, John Dae, who was watching the scene from afar, approached us.

「So, what are you going to do from now on? Are you going to defeat the Southern Emperor Ceremonic?」

Nevertheless, Seiya shook his head.

「No. There's something I have to do before that. 」

「Something you have to do, you say? 」

I was the one to respond instead of Seiya.

「You know. Seiya is planning to practice in the God's realm. 」

「Eh!! Practice in the God's realm!? At this timing!? Because, normally one would... 」

I pat John Dae's shoulder after he freaked out.

「Well, we're just going to dive in now. Honestly, I feel a bit tired. 」

「Why are you tired!? And what the hell do you mean by "dive in"!? 」

「Yes, dive in. Anyways. Just wait a little bit. 」

John Dae stood in front of us silently, while I summoned the portal to the God's realm to dive in with Seiya and Kiriko.

「See? There's no reason to freak out. It won't take much time. We'll come back here within one hour.」

「...That's not my point. 」

Then, John Dae spoke with a serious complexion.

「If you're going to the God's realm... Then there must be a god down there that can ascend me quickly and painlessly to heaven. Can you take me along with you?」

「No. You should stop thinking about that. John Dae, listen. You're fairly okay now. 」

「Of course I'm not okay! I don't want to be a half-dead person who might lose its consciousness at any moment!」

To be honest, I couldn't ascend him to heaven because of my lack of power.

「...I understand. 」

I was a bit reluctant but nodded positively in response.

—

We arrived at the God's realm square from the portal. I could finally breathe the fresh and positive atmosphere of the God's realm after spending a long time engulfed with the dark air of Exfolia.

「Kiri! John Dae! What do you think? This is such a nice place! 」

However, unlike my expectations, Kiriko held her head down, while John Dae had a painful expression on his face.

「Wha...What's wrong with you two!? 」

「I suddenly feel sick...! 」

「Me...Me too...! 」

...Did they feel sick because of the godliness that filled the God's realm!?

Even if they weren't evil, the fact that both of them were monsters remained unchanged. Maybe my guess was correct.

If so, then...there was only one solution.

「Come with me!! 」

I grabbed Kiriko's hand and began to run forward.

—

As we sat on a table at Cafe De Celseus, John Dae and Kiriko felt pleased when they stared at the face of the shopkeeper Celseus.

「I feel much better now! I don't feel any godliness from this person! 」

「Yeah, there's certainly nothing going on with him! It feels as if I'm standing next to a human instead!」

「What on earth do you mean by that!? 」

Celseus scolded them angrily, but as I expected, there was little godliness around here.

I grinned to Celseus, who was a god but had no godliness.

「Well, well, isn't it great! They like your place because it's a nice "place to relax"! At least they feel at ease with you around them!」

「I don't feel happy about that!! The true meaning is completely different from what a "place to relax" is supposed to mean!! By the way, Lista!! If I'm not godly, then you're not godly as well!!」

「Eh!? 」

Kiriko nodded in agreement.

「It's true that I don't feel any pain when I'm close to Miss Lista... 」

「You...You're kidding, right!? Kiri!! 」

I shouted aloud. Kiriko and John were having fun while looking at the sun as they covered their faces slightly from the beautiful rays of light.

「...Well, in fact, both Lista and Celseus were originally humans to begin with. Not much time as passed since they've reincarnated as deities. It can't be helped though.」

I heard a familiar voice from behind us. When I looked back, I saw Aria, a senior goddess from the God's realm. Kiriko and John were unable to look directly at Aria because she radiated a dazzling holy light.

I...I see. So, we were less divine because we were once human beings. But, I disliked the idea of being put in the same category with the likes of Celseus...

Kiriko noticed that I felt depressed. Therefore, she tried to encourage me.

「But, I have so much fun and happiness when I'm with Miss Lista! 」

「Ah...! Kiri...! 」

John Dae spoke to Aria while she looked affectionately at Kiriko for speaking lovely words to me. He must have realized that Aria was a high-ranking goddess because of her overflowing heavenliness.

「As you can see, I'm an undead. I came here because I wanted to find a god that could ascend me to heaven...Is it possible for you to do it?」

Regrettably, Aria shook her head.

「Only a god with the power of healing can ascend an undead to the heavens peacefully...Or the power of light. Unfortunately, Lista can't release her natural healing power. Moreover, the God of Light isn't currently in the God's realm at this moment.」

Of course, Seiya and I weren't the only ones requested to save other worlds. There were some gods in the God's realm that summoned other heroes in order to save earthly worlds from external menaces. The God of Light was in the midst of a saving quest.

Aria smiled gently to a silent John Dae, who looked extremely dejected.

「Why do you want to ascend so badly? There's no need to rush it. 」

「But, I could lose my human consciousness at any moment now... 」

「As far as I can see, your brain has not been eroded by the undead phenomena. I think you'll be okay for a few more years. I guarantee that.」

「Is...Is that true! 」

John Dae got a relieved expression on his face upon hearing Aria's optimistic words.

「Isn't it great, John Dae! 」

「Ah, yeah, it is! If I still have a few years left, then I'll use all my remaining strength for the recovery of the Tarmine Kingdom!」

I was sure that Queen Carmilla would be very pleased to have John Dae by her side. If the Queen is happy, then I will be happy too.

「Okay, it's been decided then! Both Kiri and John Dae will wait here at Cafe De Celseus until Seiya's training is over!」

John Dae and Kiriko nodded positively. Yet, Celseus complained about it.

「Hey, hey. Don't decide that on your own. Why do I have to be the one to take care of these two monsters? Don't you have anybody else to look after them? What a hassle...」

Indeed. This place seemed quieter than normal. I didn't see Adenela around here. I didn't ask him where she was, so I proposed another deal to Celseus.

「Then, why don't you let Kiri and John Dae help you with your coffee shop? 」

「To help me? But, these two are monsters. 」

「Oh my, you didn't know? I heard that cute monsters are in fashion on one of the earthly worlds, am I right? There are heroes that have "fluffy" monsters as companions for their innumerable adventures!」

「Certainly. Having a "cute" and "fluffy" monster could be very good for my business. So, having a mascot character is not a bad idea at all. But...」

Celseus pointed directly at Kiriko and John Dae with a trembling finger.

「Just look at them! One has a metallic body that resembles a weapon, and the other has decaying skin with a robust and muscular body! They are far from being called “fluffy” and cute”!!」

Seiya looked at a screaming Celseus with a harsh expression on his face.

「Celseus. I’m busy. Just get over with it and keep these two with you. They’ll be in your custody until I’m done.」

「No...No. Even if it’s Seiya’s request, that’s a bit unreasonable for me to... 」

He was really opposed to this idea. Actually, it was the first time I saw Celseus arguing against Seiya’s request. It was rather unusual. Then, an annoyed Seiya touched the ground with his toe. On this instant, the soil under our feet began to rise.

「You’re a very irritating fella. If you don’t agree, then you’ll have to come face to face with the “Bakudan Rock”.」

After the rock appeared from the ground, Celseus began to scream as the rock looked at him with a devilish grin on its rocky face.

「Another ugly monster has appeared!? What the hell is wrong with that rock!? That’s not “fluffy at all!! Besides, will it really explode as the name suggests!?!」

「You’re right, Celseus. Now, you’ll have to choose between an explosion or those two.」

「Why am I being threatened so suddenly!? This hero is too cruel!! 」

Seiya threatened Celseus. Then, he had no choice but to take care of those two unwillingly. After that, Seiya finally spoke with Aria about his requirements.

「Okay, Aria. I want to start my training as soon as possible in order to prepare myself against the next enemy.」

「Yes. I will introduce you to any god I know. However... 」

Aria stopped talking abruptly. She was silent for a short moment, and then she looked at me and smiled.

「Before that. Lista. I have a message from Lady Isister. She’s waiting for you at the temple.」

—

...I left Seiya with Aria. Then, I walked on the temple’s corridors on my own. I arrived at the room of the Great Goddess Isister and knocked the door gently.

I saw that the clairvoyance goddess of the highest ranking in the God’s realm was sitting on a chair. When she noticed my presence, she smiled at me with a soft expression on her face.

「It seems that Ryuguuin Seiya has defeated both the Beast Emperor the Grand Lion and the Machine Emperor Oxelio.」

I spoke with determination after I heard the Great Goddess Isister's words.

「Tha...That's right! At first, I felt a little anxious, but it was all thanks to Seiya's plan that we managed to defeat them...After all, he won the battle against Oxelio without problems!」

I was talking with great excitement. The Great Goddess Isister laughed upon seeing my blissful reaction
「Oh, oh, oh 」 .

「He defeated the Grand Lion in a direct battle that exceeded the status of the Demon King from one year ago, am I right? If so, then it won't be a problem for that hero to fight against other enemies in Exfolia from now on.」

The Great Goddess Isister pointed out that particular information to me. When I thought deeply about it, I realized that I didn't notice that until now.

That's correct! I didn't need to feel anxious at all when Seiya went up to fight with the Machine Emperor Oxelio! Seiya defeated the Grand Lion, who was supposed to be the strongest enemy around! So, if he defeated the strongest enemy, then that meant that Seiya could win against the Demon King without much hassle!

「Most probably, Ryuguuin Seiya's abilities have reached a level far beyond those of human beings.」

The Great Goddess Isister was smiling tenderly. I felt happy to hear her praises. Nonetheless...

「Really, he is one of the many great heroes that excels in strength. 」

「...Eh. 」

I felt puzzled by the Great Goddess Isister's words and asked her the following.

「Ex...Excuse me...But, was there a hero stronger than Seiya before? 」

「The history of the God's realm is long and deep. I know other heroes who have vastly surpassed the strength of Ryuguuin Seiya. Well, it doesn't undermine the power of your hero, but we do have a history of very powerful heroes...」

Aria and Adenela, who were much more experienced than me as goddesses, said that heroes like Seiya were one of a kind. That someone as strong as Seiya won't ever appear again.

...And yet, a few other heroes were stronger than Seiya!?

I was very interested in this topic. Even so...

「Let's leave that story for another day. 」

The Great Goddess Isister changed the topic smoothly.

「The Beast Emperor the Grand Lion and the Machine Emperor Oxelio. By defeating these two enemies with great magical power, the mist of dark energy covering Exfolia has faded a little and the world became clearer and sunnier. But, there's something I have to tell you. I am aware that an evil existence is giving protection to our enemies just as a god of the God's realm gives protection to a hero.」

「Are you...talking about the evil god? 」

「That's right. There are rules for the gods of the God's realm, but there are also rules for the evil gods as well. The evil gods can't harm heroes directly. Likewise, our gods can't defeat the Demon Kings that reign over other worlds.」

...We, as gods, summon the heroes and give our support indirectly in order to defeat the Demon Kings. On the other side of the coin, the evil gods give power to the Demon Kings to defeat the heroes. So, that's the reason why the evil god in Exfolia didn't harm Seiya directly...

「But, please be careful. The evil god that resides in Exfolia has a tremendous power. His power is so fearsome that it obstructs my prediction and clairvoyance abilities. Besides, I often wonder what changes the Demon King Artemaeus received with the protection of the evil god from this past year. Honestly, I can't even imagine it...」

It seemed quite serious since the Great Goddess Isister, who was capable of predicting the future, wasn't even able to imagine the powers of our enemies.

「Lista. If you find out about the name and characteristics of that evil god, I'd want you to tell me about it immediately. We can take proper measures if we know more about that evil god. Well, it might be difficult to find details because it's rare for evil gods to show themselves to others...」

「Ye...Yes! I will contact you straightaway if I find something! 」

「I entrust it to you. 」

After that part of the conversation was over, the Great Goddess Isister changed topics.

「By the way...At the same time you came back to the God's realm, I sensed the presence of two monsters arriving as well. It looks like we've got here an undead soldier and a magical machine with a human soul.」

「Ah! I...I apologize! Please forgive me for letting two monsters come to the God's realm!」

I bowed my head in apology. I really thought that she would get angry with me. Yet, the Great Goddess Isister shook her head quietly.

「It's okay. I don't feel any hatred nor evil intent in them.」

「Yes! Kiri is a very good girl and John Dae is a relatively decent undead...Ah, well, but, he is a little bit lewd though!」

「We have to spread the "sleeves" of our hearts to every "blub of light". So, I think it is necessary for human beings alike and us, the almighty gods, to have a pleasant and harmonious relationship.」

...Yes. In fact, I felt somewhat indebted to John Dae because of my past human self. It felt strange that I had some sort of relationship with that person before...

After finishing talking, the Great Goddess Isister picked up a wool ball that was placed on top of her table. It looked like she kept doing her knitting hobby on her spare time.

「This story is over for now. I wish you a safe journey. 」

「Thank you very much! Excuse me! 」

When I tried to leave her room...

「...Listarte. 」

The Great Goddess Isister called my name all of a sudden. I became surprised when I looked back. The Great Goddess Isister had an unusual expression on her face. She looked rather sad.

「Could you tell Ryuguuin Seiya to come here later on by himself? 」

「Tell Seiya to come here alone? Yes...I understand. I will let him know. 」

I replied positively even though I felt a bit worried about it. The Great Goddess Isister's returned a soft smile as she resumed her knitting.

Chapter 91: The Goddess of Gold

I left the Great Goddess Isister's room and went to the Cafe De Celseus. When I arrived, I was surprised to see that Seiya and Aria were still speaking with each other.

What!? I thought that Seiya had already started his training sessions!!

There was something odd going on between them. Seiya had an unsatisfactory expression on his face while he spoke with Aria.

「Is it really not possible? Can't I practice for a hundred hours a day? 」

「I will say it again. That won't be possible, Seiya... 」

I laughed a little. Then, I approached Seiya who remained silent after hearing Aria's denial.

「Hey, Seiya! A day has only 24 hours! 」

Seiya looked at me and sighed deeply. I was clueless, but Aria explained to me what was going on between them.

「Lista. Seiya wants to practice with a god who has the power to prevent curses. But, it's tough for me because I can't grant him his request.」

「A god that prevents curses? 」

Then, John Dae explained the following from the other side of the table.

「The Emperor Ceremonic from the Southern Continent of Cress is known as the "Walking Disaster". He is rumored to cast powerful curses. But, nobody knows what kind of curses this enemy is capable of using...」

Ah, I see. That's why Seiya wanted to acquire a new skill for the battle with Ceremonic Emperor.

「But, Aria. Why isn't Seiya able to learn that skill? 」

「Some boundaries can't be crossed no matter how hard one tries. For example, no matter how hard Seiya trains himself, he won't be able to use Lista's "healing magic" powers. The problem is quite simple. Effort and talent aren't always enough. On this particular issue, the problem is the "characteristics", on which Seiya can't learn the skill he wants. After all, the power to prevent curses belongs to the same power as Lista's healing magic.」

「Is that so? I see. That's a shame... 」

Then, I realized something important right after I spoke.

「Wait!! If that's the case, why don't I learn that skill myself!? 」

「Eh, yes. I recommended that option to Seiya. But, he hated the idea. 」

Seiya was staring at me with a disgusting face.

「I refuse. I won't get good results with this option. 」

「But, you won't know about that until we try!! 」

「I know it too well. You never did something useful on my behalf. 」

「Well, that is...it may be so, but...! 」

Seiya completely ignored me, and changed topics.

「If this is the result, then I don't have the choice but to change my plan. 」

After saying that, I shouted aloud after Seiya began to walk away.

「Ah, Seiya! The Great Goddess Isister wants to see you! Go to her room later on! 」

He raised one hand slightly upon hearing my words. He looked extremely annoyed. Even if it was a bother for him, Seiya had a cautious personality. That's why I knew that he would go visit the Great Goddess Isister later today.

Aria smiled afterwards.

「Well...We're talking about Seiya after all. He'll find an alternative way to prevent curses. 」

Still, my sense didn't fade. Everything would be solved if I acquired that skill!

「Aria! I want to do it for real! I want to learn that skill! 」

「Eh! But, Seiya... 」

「What if Seiya doesn't find an alternative way to learn how to prevent curses! Nothing would go to waste if I end up mastering that skill! I might be useful somehow even if learns an alternative way! Am I right?」

「That is...I guess you're right. 」

「Please, Aria! Introduce me to the god that prevents curses! 」

Aria finally nodded positively after I convinced her with my sincere appeal. On this moment, my heart began to burn fervently.

So far, I only made lunch boxes for Seiya while he trained extremely hard! Instead of being useful only for cooking, I could do much more in order to support my hero on this saving quest! I finally got a chance to prove my worth as a goddess! I began to see the “sun in the horizon”! A new hope for me!

Okay! I’ll do it! I could finally be useful for Seiya if I learnt the skill to prevent curses!

I was extremely excited. However, Aria was looking seriously at me.

「If you’re willing to learn, Lista. Then, bring as much money as you can from your room. 」

「Much money, you say!? Okay, I understand...But, for what!? 」

—

『Listen, Lista. The God of Light would be the appropriate god to teach you about preventing curses. But, right now, the God of Light is saving another world. In addition, the second candidate Dazuma, the Glittering God, is also away. That’s why I will introduce you to the third candidate, the Goddess of Gold, Bardul. Actually, I’m not too familiar with this goddess, but...』

At this precise moment, I was walking through the paths of the Heavenly Green Forest. Aria told me to go on the opposite direction from the place from where Mithis was, the Goddess of Bow, and the Well of No Return, where Zeth, the other Goddess of War, was trapped within.

After walking for a while, the dense forest dissipated a little and a new scenario unfolded right in front of my eyes. There was a large mansion with a tiled roof.

Most of the buildings and structures of the God’s realm resembled the medieval western architecture of Seiya’s world. Yet, this large mansion looked like a temple in Japan. It looked a bit out of place to be honest.

I crossed the pond to arrive at the entrance. Then, I slowly opened the door made of wood.

「Excuse me... 」

There was a large tatami* in front of me. I wondered how many tatami were used on the floor. On the backside of the room was a rehearsal hall. Someone was sitting next to an oriental altar as if it were used for meditation.

「Sorry. Excuse me, please. But, are you the Goddess of Gold, Bardul? 」

When I called over, that person opened her eyes slowly.

「...Quite so. I am Bardul. 」

She stood up and walked slowly towards me. Bardul was a little bit overweight and resembled a middle-aged auntie. She wore a gorgeous golden kimono and wore many ornaments around her neck and hands. Because of that, she made a noise every time she took a step forward.

「Well then, my child. What are your worries? 」

「I...I'm a bit in trouble on my quest to save a world. That's why I came here to ask for your help, Lady Bardul. I want you to teach me the technique to prevent curses.」

Then, Bardul smiled tenderly at me.

「If I teach you about the secret of my power, you will be able to seal your opponent's curse, meaning that your opponent's curse won't be triggered. Also, if someone gets cursed, you'll be able to extinguish that curse immediately.」

「Is...Is that so! Amazing! Please, tell me your secret! 」

「Of course, my child! I shall accept you as my pupil and you will gain the power of the universe!」

Ah, thank goodness! Unexpectedly, everything went smoothly! I was going to be trained properly this time!

「So, Lady Bardul. How long does it take to learn that curse-sealing technique? 」

「That will depend on your heart. Please, show me your feelings child. 」

「I won't lose to anyone with my determination and motivation! 」

This time, I'll help Seiya no matter what! With this determination in mind, I grasped both of my fists in front of my chest... Nonetheless, Bardul's face became cloudy.

「Ah no, that wasn't what I meant...Please, express to me your "feelings". First, you should express your gratitude for introducing myself as Bardul. I shall accept 1000 *godon*.」

I shouted immediately at Bardul, who made a money gesture to me with her thumb and index fingers.

「Ehhh!? Those were the "feelings" you were talking about!? 」

Bardul hardened her expression even further.

「Don't you want to save that world!? 」

「Ye...Yes, but...! But, introductory money is a bit...! 」

By the way, *godon* was the holy currency used in the God's realm. Due to our influence as deities, all of us could create many necessary things for our life with the power bestowed by the Supreme God of Creation, Brahma. However, if we wanted to have extras, like for example, fashionable clothes made by the God of Art, or luxurious furniture made by the God of Architecture, it'd be necessary to pay for it. That's why we used a special currency, named *godon*, for those extra necessities in the God's realm.

「I won't tell you my secret if you don't pay the introductory money. 」

And then, Bardul turned her head away.

...I looked into my wallet. In addition to the money I received from the Great Goddess Isister every month as an allowance, I also received a large sum of money as my reward for saving Geabrande. Therefore, my total savings amounted to 30,000 godon.

I took a 1000 godon banknote from my wallet.

「I...I understand. So, here it is... 」

「Oh! I shall receive your feelings with delight! 」

Bardul received the banknote straightaway as she grabbed it quickly from my hand.

We...Well, 1000 godon was not too much to being with! I'll gratefully pay it in order to start my training soon enough!

「Well then, Lady Bardul! Thank you for receiving me! I'll be in your care! 」

However, Bardul brought a large pot with her and placed it in front of me.

「This pot must increase in weight if you want to learn about the secret of curse-sealing! I shall receive 4000 godon now!」

...A...A pot...!?

I was speechless. Then, she took a small box and showed me plenty of jewels and accessories in it.

「Moreover, you need to have a sacred item to help you invoke the curse-sealing technique. I have a large selection of tokens, such as rosary beads, rings and other glittering ornaments! Everything at a reasonable price!」

...This...This...This goddess is...!!

「Ah, my child! Don't you know other gods with curses troubles? If you invite your god friend to learn this secret too, I'll give you a special discount fee! This way, the formula of your divine power will increase significantly!」

She gave me a stamp card by force.

...Oh no!! This auntie goddess was too shady!!

This scenario was completely different from the training I've envisioned. I gave the stamp card back to her.

「No!! First, introductory money, then sacred items and now you want to get profits by using my friends!? This is too much!! And in the first place, isn't there a rule that things obtained in the God's realm shouldn't be taken to the human world!?!」

「After purchasing the item, you just need to put it near the pot and a rosary in order to adapt the power of the newly acquired skill! Even if you stop this ritual, and go to the earthly world, the effect will last for three whole days!」

Re...Really...? Still, I couldn't trust anything she professed...!

This auntie goddess got a sharp tongue. Then, she fiercely increased her tone.

「Anyways! The ritual is absolutely necessary for the curse-sealing technique! I won't be able to teach you this without purchasing the necessary tools for the ritual!」

Under normal circumstances, I would go home immediately without buying anything. But, I felt a great deal of annoyance when I recalled the battle between Seiya and the Grand Lion.

...I really wanted to help Seiya no matter what...!!

In the end, I ended up purchasing the sacred items necessary for the ritual. I paid 29,000 godon for everything she demanded. My pocket money had almost entirely disappeared.

Among the items, I bought a ring with a rosary that was supposed to be very special for the ritual. After holding the pot in one hand, I told Bardul the following words.

「All right! Now, you'll train me, right? I'll be under your care! 」

However, Bardul was looking fixedly at my godon, and not exactly at me.

「No, my child. The training is complete. 」

「Eh...! It...It can't be...! How...! 」

「Your training was completed once you purchased the items. You should go home now. I shall you give my thanks.」

After staring at the plump goddess counting my godon banknotes with a humming song...My anger finally reached its peak.

「Don't you dare joke with me, you old hag!! How the hell is my "training complete"! I just bought some items, a rosary and a pot!!」

「What!? 」

The auntie goddess began to scream when I held her chest with anger.

「Wha...What a foul mouth you have...! Oh lord...You are a very dangerous goddess...! 」

「Who's the dangerous one here!! Anyways!! Just return my godon back, you cheating goddess!!」

「Just wait a second! I'm not a cheating goddess! I'll prove it to you! 」

And then, Bardul rushed to the altar and brought a wooden box with her. Then, she took a doll in a kimono out of the wooden box. The doll resembled the Japanese dolls of Seiya's world. However, the hair was fairly longer and she was somewhat creepy.

「This doll is a cursed doll whose hair grows little by little every night. 」

「In...Indeed. I can really feel an ominous feeling coming from that thing...But, why is that thing in the God's realm in the first place?」

「I ordered this doll purposely because I wanted to practice with curse-sealing. After you gain some power with the sacred items, it will be possible to dissipate this curse with a spell...」

Then, Bardul sprinkled the rosary over the doll.

「Curse! Disappear! Go, go away! Ei, ei, ei, ei! 」

My breath was heavy as I watched this scene. Yet, nothing happened at all. It looked like this auntie goddess cheated again.

After a while, I grabbed Bardul's chest again.

「What the crap is this "ei ei" thing!! 」

「Ple...Please calm down! Just look! 」

I heard a strange sound and the cursed doll's black hair fell off.

「The...The doll's...hair...!? 」

Bardul spoke satisfactorily, while pointing at the doll that became bald.

「See! The curse dissipated away! This is the real technique! I showed you the secret of the curse-sealing!」

「But, isn't this thing just a bald doll!? 」

The more I looked at it, the more I saw just a regular Japanese doll whose head became bald.

「I have other dolls! So, let's practice a bit more! 」

「Ehhhh... 」

A similar longhaired doll was placed right in front of me. I tried to do the same thing as Bardul did to lift up the curse.

「Cu...Curse, please disappear...Now...Ei, ei... 」

「You have to strongly believe in it!! You have to say it with more power and passion!! Like an artist that wields the towel to a cheering and lively audience!! Or like an angry audience who scream angrily at their artist who just disappointed them on stage!!」

Was she trying to tell me to be a bad customer with rude manners!?

I tried to scream with all my might while shaking the rosary on the doll.

「Ei, ei!! Ei, ei, ei, ei!! Eiiiiiii!! 」

And then, I heard the strange sound! The hair fell and the doll became bald!

「Bald! I did it! It's bald now! 」

「Yes, it is bald! Congratulations, my child! 」

「Ah, no!! Wait a moment!! Didn't I just make a doll turn bald!? 」

「This result is superb! You could only do it because the power of light was activated! You've learnt this expertise and got a license! So, this is the ending of your training! Congratulations! The exit is over there!」

「The training is already over!? Is this really okay!? 」

In addition to the short period of training, I felt that the quality was too low when compared to Seiya's training. I didn't know what a license was, or if it was really necessary to have one in the first place.

I wasn't convinced about this training. It felt too abrupt and fake. Then, I noticed that Bardul returned to the hall room and went to the altar. She bent over and had a serious expression on her face.

「Ah, godon. I need more, much more godon. No matter what I do, and no matter where I go, I'll make sure to have more godon...」

I felt uncomfortable after witnessing such a scene.

Bardul was a powerful goddess that lived a privileged life in the God's realm. Why would she be crazily obsessed with godon?

I noticed that Bardul was looking attentively at some photo at the altar. It was the picture of a youthful male god.

...Wa...Wait! Don't tell me that that god was...Bardul's...?

I was curious, so I asked Bardul the following question.

「Excuse me, Bardul. Why do you go to such lengths just to get godon? 」

「That's because... 」

Then, Bardul began to grin weirdly.

「Of course, I'll go to such lengths in order to accumulate more godon!! I'm saving enough money to further expand this magnificent Bardul Palace!! And someday, I'll live here with the handsome god of this photograph, my dear "Lord Apollon"!!」

「Was that the reason why you're so fanatical with godon!? What an insane greed you have, you old auntie!!」

Chapter 92: Another Case

I wore the ring with a rosary on one hand, and the pot on the other hand. I went to the Café De Celseus with conflicted emotions. I complained to Aria when I arrived.

「I wonder if I can seal the curses with this sort of sloppy training. Actually, it feels as if I went shopping instead of training.」

「Hmm. So, it seems that the rumors about Bardul are actually true. We...Well, at least, did you “learn something useful” about the curse-sealing technique?」

「That was my intention. But, you know, this is frustrating because most of my money is gone now, and I don't actually see any visible changes...」

Aria stared fixedly at me and narrowed her eyes.

「But, Lista. I can see that your body is full of godliness, you know? 」

「Eh, no way!! Really!? 」

At the same time, I heard a cheerful voice from behind.

「You're amazing, Miss Lista! You're more dazzling and divine than you were before! 」

I looked back and noticed that Kiriko was extremely excited for me while holding a tray with a coffee cup.

I was surprised. Then, I stared at the rosary and pot with a stunned look.

...These sacred items were really effective...!

I was a little relieved to know that the money I spent was not completely wasted. I received the coffee cup from Kiriko with a smile on my face.

「Thank you, Kiri! 」

「Yes! 」

Kiriko replied with a vigorous and bright tone. She was in a waitress' apron. It seemed that Celseus was guiding them earnestly.

「So, how about Celseus? Is he a good mentor? 」

Just when I asked Kiriko that question...

「What the hell is this!! 」

I heard John Dae's loud scream from afar. Both Celseus and John Dae were facing each other with heated expressions on their faces.

These two...I...I knew it. I had a hunch that they wouldn't be amicable with each other!

I got up and rushed on their direction.

「Hey! Stop fighting! 」

However, the scene was strange. John Dae was staring at Celseus with burning eyes while he held a dish with a cake that he had eaten.

「I've never eaten such a delicious cake before!! 」

「Re...Really? Is my cake that delicious? 」

「It's not only good, it's divine! You're a genius! 」

John Dae gave a strong and heartfelt handshake with Celseus' hand.

「I mustn't doze around after eating such a wonderful piece of cake! Let me help you! Should I wash the dishes first? 」

「Yeah, I'll leave them to you... 」

This time, however, was Kiriko, who run to Celseus after John Dae began to wash the dishes diligently.

「Mr. Celseus. Is this tableware all right? 」

「Ah, yeah. I don't see any problem with it... 」

After John Dae and Kiriko left to do other chores, Celseus stood still as if his soul vanished.

I approached Celseus and touched his shoulder.

「I'm glad for you, Celseus! You found great part-timers! 」

I was shocked when Celseus turned his face. Tears! Celseus was crying dramatically!

「Hey, you!! Why are you crying that much!? 」

「Ugh! I did a huge mistake! I misjudged those monsters! Those two are extremely wonderful beings! Ugh! 」

「But, you don't have to cry just because of that... 」

It felt weird to see this robust man cry. After a while, Celseus finally wiped his tears with his hands.

「“You can stay here forever”...Let them know how I feel. 」

I smiled at Celseus. Then, I went back to the table where Aria was sitting.

「Aria! Those three seem to be getting along well! 」

「Yes. They get along surprisingly well. I'm glad. 」

After laughing together for a while, Aria suddenly remembered something important.

「By the way, Lista. About Seiya, you know. He came here straightaway after he met with Lady Isister in her room. Then, he asked me some questions about souls.」

「Souls? 」

Apparently, Seiya asked Aria about reincarnation and the formation of the human soul.

Aria spoke with a puzzling expression on her face.

「I've never been interested in that topic before. So, I didn't had enough knowledge on that matter...It looked like he wasn't very satisfied with my answer. He said “whatever. I'm going to start my training in order to defeat Ceremonic”, then he went away.」

So, Seiya really wanted to know about souls? But, for what? Did it had something to do with the Great Goddess Isister's talk?

「So...So, what kind of training is Seiya going to do now? 」

「Let's see. Did he say “State Berserk”? Yes, he said something about going higher...」

「Is he going to increase his State Berserk!? 」

...It can't be!! Was he trying to achieve the Phase 3rd!? But, I heard it was impossible!!

「I'm going to see him now!! Aria, just take this pot!! 」

「Wait, Lista!? Listen to the rest of the story...Ah, heavy!! This pot is extremely heavy!! 」

I left the pot with Aria, and rushed to the Heavenly Green Forest again. If Seiya was aiming to increase the points of his Crazy Warrior state, then he must've gone to the Well of No Return where Zeth was locked inside.

—

It was dusk at the Heavenly Green Forest... I proceeded to that deep place. The trees were lit red like blood, creating a magical and eerie atmosphere in the forest. It was still scary as hell. I wanted to go home before the sun went down. Therefore, I rushed to the well without stopping or even looking back.

On my way, I heard a familiar voice.

「Oh my, look who's here. Lista. I'm delighted to see you here. Where are you going?」

I noticed a presence from someone who put a bow and arrow down. The lewd goddess who once tried to attack Seiya with her nakedness called me. Actually, Mithis, the Goddess of Bow, had a different exterior demeanor now as opposed to her perverted side. She looked clean and pretty as if she came out of a dream.

「Ah, you see, I'm going to the Well of No Return... 」

Mithis put her hand on her chin and said, 「Is that so 」 .

「Aren't you too alone in this forest? If you'd like, I could accompany you. 」

「Is...Is that all right? If so, then I will gladly accept your kindness. 」

The closer we approached the well, the more the forest became horrifying. Soon, the sun will go down, and the visibility will get worse. It was reassuring to have a companion to walk on this dreadful part of the forest. Mithis was a lewd goddess who attacked men upon seeing them. But she was harmless to women, so that least, for me was safe. I was happy to accept Mithis' offer.

I walked in the forest with Mithis while talking about the adventures in Exfolia.

If I were alone, the path would seem too long to cross over. But, since I had company and had a lively chat, the path felt shorter than usual. Eventually, the eerie old well became visible.

「Ah, the Well of No Return! 」

I rushed immediately to the well. I began to descend the rope ladder that led to the bottom of the well.

「I'm going down with you. 」

Mithis came down with me...

「What!? Thi...This is!! Why!? 」

I was astonished when I arrived at the bottom of the well.

When we came here last time, the well was a vast space where Seiya could practice without any problems. But, when Mithis and I arrived at the bottom, I realized that we were stuck on a very narrow space. I couldn't see Zeth anywhere on this withered well. It felt as if this well was just a regular well in the first place.

...Ze...Zeth disappeared!?

...What on earth happened around here? Did she move away? Or maybe...?

A mountain of confusing thoughts swirled on my head...

「...Lista. 」

Suddenly, I heard Mithis calling my name and I looked back. At that moment, my confusing thoughts stopped coming at my brain.

「Wha...Wha...Wha...!! 」

Mithis took off her dress and became naked.

「Wa...Wait!! Why are you suddenly taking off your clothes!? 」

I screamed like a mad woman without knowing the reason why she took off her clothes. Then, Mithis slowly approached me amidst the darkness of the well.

「Every single day, I practice the bow by myself in the forest...I have no contact with other male gods on my daily life...So, I came to realize something significant...」

And then, she stared at me with thirsty eyes.

「I thought that it wouldn't be a bad idea if I were to be with a goddess instead...」

「You're kidding, right!? 」

At the same time...Mithis embraced me tightly.

「Okay, Lista!! Let's profess our love from one another here and now!! 」

「I...I...I don't have that kind of hobby!! 」

I complained, but she didn't even listen! She was trying to strip off my dress while having an erotic rough breath!

I tried to get away, but I couldn't! Wha...What a strength! And, what a strong sexual desire!

「Oh my, oh my! Welcome to the world of "Gachi Yuri"*!! 」

What!? She was laughing like a maniac!! This was too scary!! Besides, what the hell was "Gachi Yuri"? This was no good!! This goddess was too perverted that even words couldn't describe her lunatic behavior!! Her mental level was so insane that looked like she was cursed!!...Ah!!

I tried to push my arms down; suddenly, something useful came to my mind...I took the rosary from my wrist and aimed it at Mithis.

「E...Ei, ei!! Ei, ei, ei, ei!! 」

I prayed aloud, 「Cursed sexual desire, disappear! 」 . I left the pot with Aria. But, I still had lots of beads and rings that I've bought from Bardul! There had to be some kind of effect!

However, Mithis looked at me while I screamed. Somehow, this excited her even more and her cheeks became fully red. Then, she bit her thumb.

「Ah...I'm so excited...! I never thought I'd feel this way...! 」

「Ei, ei...Stop acting like this!! 」

Still, nothing much happened no matter how much I screamed. Then, an ecstatic Mithis came closer to my face.

At this point, I was about to cry.

strange sound

Many white little things fell right in front of my face. Mithis changed her complexion when she realized what happened to her hair.

「This is...my hair...what happened to my hair!? 」

Mithis was shocked. Then, I sent a harsh gaze on her direction.

「Ri...Right now, you are almost bald! But, if you try something strange with me again, I will make sure you'll be completely bald!」

Mithis was also a goddess. Therefore, appearance was also important for her. She immediately jumped away from me.

「Gi...give me a break!! I'd hate to have bare skin on the top of my head!! 」

...We walked away after going up the rope ladder of the well.

「I hate this look, Lista. I was only joking with you back then... 」

Lies! She would've attacked me seriously if I didn't make half of her hair fall!

「Even so, Lista. I was so shocked about what happened. You became a "goddess of hair loss" so abruptly.」

「You're unbelievable!! Lady Mithis!! Please, remain silent!! 」

—

After returning from the Heavenly Green Forest, I headed towards the summoning chamber of heroes in the temple.

Actually, I went to the Cafe first. Aria told me that Seiya was practicing in the summoning chamber with Adenela. I felt extremely exhausted.

...I was the one responsible for feeling this way. When I heard that Seiya was trying to raise his Berserk mode, I thought that he'd go to Zeth's place. But, instead, Seiya was trying to improve his sword skills with the Crazy Warrior state with Adenela.

...Ah, what a waste of time...

I moved my shoulders up and down with frustration, while I opened the summoning chamber's doors.

「Hmm...Lista. Don't come in without my permission. I'm training now. 」

Seiya, who was in a Crazy Warrior state with his hair and eyes dyed red, stopped wielding his sword with Adenela.

「So, you were really training in here... 」

Seiya sighed and shook his nose.

「With this overwhelming power, I will defeat the enemy before a curse is activated. 」

After saying that, Seiya wielded his sword once again. Without even saying anything, Adenela sensed Seiya's movements and took her offensive stance straightaway.

「State Berserk Phase 2.7...! 」

The fatigue I've felt on my body blew away when I heard Seiya's words.

...Phase 2.7!? Wasn't 2.6 his maximum stage when he confronted the Grand Lion and Oxelio!? But, this stage was a little higher than that!!

Nevertheless, that wasn't the only aspect that surprised me. In his Berserk mode, Seiya wielded his Platinum Sword against Adenela's god swords.

「Atomic Split Slash! 」

The floor shook terribly because of the huge explosion that burst from their attack! The roaring sound was so big that my earlobes quivered! I was blown away by the shock wave that occurred at the same time! After that, when I got up, I noticed that a huge crater was created on the floor! Furthermore, many cracks were scattered across the floor in all directions!

「What a power...!! But, Seiya!! What about Lady Adenela!? 」

「Of course, I'm moderate. I wasn't really going to hit her. 」

Seiya pointed with the tip of his sword. On that direction, I saw that Adenela, who jumped high in the mid-air to avoid the strike of the Atomic Split Slash, came down.

Ah, what a relief...Adenela was safe! Even so, what an amazing power! Well, the usual Atomic Split Slash was amazing alone! But, since it was released with the increased power of the Berserk mode, its force was overwhelmingly higher...

「Wa...Wait a moment!! I thought that you couldn't use your skills while you were in a Berserk mode!! Zeth told us that it was impossible to do it at the same time!!」

「No. It's not impossible if I know the trick to overcome it. 」

I...I couldn't believe this!! Who the hell was this hero!? He always reversed what was said to be "impossible"!!

I was amazed. But, it was nothing for Seiya.

「It's the same thing as reading a book while eating your meal. Its bad manners, but it's not impossible to do it.」

That's it!? It felt so easy that even I could do it...No...No, these were the words of a genius!! I bet that stage would be extremely difficult to achieve....!!

「*laughs crazily* It...is pe...perfect. Seiya be...became stronger again. 」

I wasn't the only one to be amazed at this genius hero. Adenela was laughing creepily with a great satisfaction.

「The...The stronger the curse, the...the longer it will take to activate, and...and more troublesome the conditions will be. The...There is no meaning, if...if there's no hype...for Seiya and I...the curse won't be amusing if...if it's a haste-type curse.」

When I nodded upon hearing Adenela's explanation, Seiya put his sword on his sheath.

「Yeah. The "State Berserk Phase 2.7" and the "Berserk Simultaneous Activation of Techniques". These two should be enough for me to go up against the Emperor Ceremonic.」

「Ohh! So, you're already Perfectly Ready! 」

However, Seiya turned his eyes to me.

「Lista. I heard that you learnt the curse-sealing technique, am I correct? 」

「Ah, yes. I was able to learn it, but... 」

「Let me tell you this. There won't be an opportunity for you to meddle in this.」

「Bu...But, you know! I may be useful somehow! Seiya! Don't you remember? You told me before to be prepared just in case something bad happens!」

「What are you saying? "Just in case" is my training with Adenela. A strong fortress has already been built on the southern coast of the Radral Continent. The Emperor Ceremoni won't be able to cross over. And, if he appears to be a true menace, I'll just activate both of my strong points with the Berserk Simultaneous Activation of Techniques and the State Berserk Phase 2.7.」

His overly confident persona made me feel so small. I swallowed dry upon hearing his unsympathetic talk.

He...He really thought that something bad wouldn't happen at all! I did my best to prepare for this that I even spent my entire fortune...!

After I lost my determination, I asked Seiya the following question.

「...So, are we going to Exfolia now? 」

Unexpectedly, Seiya's reply took me by surprise.

「No. I want to stay in the heavenly world for another two days or so. 」

「Eh? Aren't you Perfectly Ready? 」

「The preparations for the battle against the Emperor Ceremoni are ready. But... 」

Seiya stared fixedly at my face. I felt that he were about to tell me something. Yet, he simply turned his face away.

「There's still another case to take care off. 」

「Another case? 」

Without telling me much, Seiya got out of the summoning chamber.

...What was going on? I wondered if the Great Goddess Isister summoned him again...Or was it related to the story about souls that Aria told me about...?

"Be in the God's realm for a longer period even though he was ready to face the enemy"... I felt that something was different than usual. We were supposed to stay for just a few days, but we decided to spend a little more time in the God's realm than originally planned.

Chapter 93: Lifeless Land

The morning of my third day in the God's realm. I went to the Cafe De Celseus to meet up with Kiriko.

Behind the table with a parasol that I usually chatted with Aria, was a small building with a kitchen. John Dae and Kiriko were staying there.

「Kiri. Are you done? 」

I entered the room assigned to Kiriko. It was a small and cozy room. When I went inside, I noticed that Kiriko was covered in sheets at the corner of the room.

「So...Sorry! Were you sleeping? But, Kiri, can you really sleep? 」

A very shy Kiriko scratched her head slightly.

「No, I never sleep. But, Mr. Celseus said, "you have to sleep after working hard"...」

Eh...Why was he trying to put a robot to sleep? Celseus was a true idiot after all...!

「I'm sorry about that, Kiri. I'll explain to that idiot how you operate. 」

Still, Kiriko shook her head.

「It's fine! I am grateful to Mr. Celseus! Besides, I am truly happy to be here and be treated like a human being!」

「Is...Is that so? 」

Well, if she didn't have a problem with that, then it was okay I guess...

「Okay, Kiri. Can you come here for a second? 」

I sat Kiriko in front of the room's mirror stand.

「You are a girl. So, you need to be a little bit more fashionable. 」

And then, I took a flower pendant that I had prepared beforehand and attached it onto Kiriko's chest.

「Wha...What is this? 」

「This flower is the one that Kiri took proper care back in Tarmine! Before the flowers withered, I took one of them and put it on a pouch to preserve the flower! It's a present!」

Kiriko, who was surprised at first, grabbed my hand vigorously, and waved it up and down.

「Thank you so much, Miss Lista!! I will cherish it!! 」

I knew that Kiriko would be delighted. The pink flower accessory attached on her chest softened the image of the Killing Machine as a magical weapon.

I was looking happily at Kiriko from the reflection on the mirror. Yet, Kiriko wasn't looking at herself but to my reflection instead.

「Miss Lista is really beautiful!! 」

「Eh. That's not true. 」

I was humble. But, I felt my tension rising up secretly. I became very sensitive to compliments after Seiya treated me so poorly.

I stared at my face again.

...Was she right? Was it true? I was beautiful, correct? Because, I was a goddess after all! Am I right? I wondered why Seiya didn't notice my charm!

Pretty, yes pretty, uhuh, I was really pretty...I became a bit of a narcissist. Nevertheless, I noticed something strange on the corner of my mouth that was reflected in the mirror.

「Eh...? 」

I thought that my eyes were tricking me, but what I saw was clear.

「Ah...? 」

Countless of wrinkles appeared on my forehead and, at the corners of my eyes and mouth! My beautiful blonde hair became fully white!

「Wha...Wha...What is this!? 」

「Mi...Miss Lista!? You...You transformed into a grandmother so suddenly!! 」

Both of us were in shock. Then, we heard a soft voice speaking right next to us.

「Okay. The growth rate was extremely fast. What a great power. 」

「Ahhhhhhhh! 」

When I looked sideways, I noticed that Seiya was pointing a red sword on my direction! A red-black aura from that blade engulfed my entire body!

「This was your doing!??????? 」

「That's the power of this sword. I bought a sword from the beast people before. Apparently, the sword absorbs life energy. So, I synthesized that sword with the amulet of the evil god's protection and created this brand-new sword.」

When Seiya moved the sword away from me, the wrinkles on my face disappeared immediately. But, when I approached him, I became a wrinkled grandmother once again.

「I'm getting old and young continuously!? Just stop this already!! 」

「It's a mysterious sword. Do you want to use your appraisal skill? 」

While my nose got twitchy, I activated my Appraisal skill just as Seiya did.

『"Holy Power Drain Sword"...A sword that absorbs the holy spirit of a god! Just by getting close to the blade, the god will grow old and become weak! 』

I shouted aloud while I quivered my chin.

「What the hell is wrong with that useless sword!! 」

「"Holy Power Drain Sword", huh. It's a very long name. From now on, I'll call it "Lista Granny Sword".」

「Hey, you, don't be ridiculous!! 」

「I'm not joking. I was developing a sword to replace the Platinum Sword. Either way, I think that Exfolia won't have any powerful weapons to defeat the Demon King.」

「You can't beat the Demon King with that failure!! 」

「It's not a failure. It may be useful for the future. Besides, I want to create a spare as soon as possible.」

「We don't need two or three of that sword!! 」

I yelled at Seiya, who didn't seem to be bothered much as he put that eerie sword on the tool luggage.

「By the way, did you wanted to stay behind in order to create that thing!? 」

「No. That's "another case". 」

I didn't understand what he meant by that!! How many things were he focused on!?

「The original "case" has not advanced much. That's why I had no choice but to stay in the heavenly world for a longer period of time. We shall stay here until the end of today. So, get ready.」

After professing those words, Seiya left the room in a rush.

「What's going on, c'mon!! 」

He came here out of nowhere, transformed into a wrinkled grandmother and told me to get ready immediately. I felt frustrated by this situation, but Kiriko talked cheerfully.

「Mr. Seiya really loves Miss Lista! 」

「Ah, what!? 」

「I'm glad to see that you two have a close relationship! 」

We had a "close relationship"; she said...What does that mean? Hmm. Kiri was a robot after all. She didn't know much about men and women...

—

After regaining composure, I got ready and went to inform John Dae that our party had to go back to Exfolia. When Celseus heard about the story, he looked regretful.

「Please stop by whenever you come to the God's realm. 」

「Yeah. Thank you for mentoring me. 」

After a strong handshake with John Dae, Celseus looked back at Kiriko.

「Kiriko as well. You have my gratitude. Our shop flourished thanks to you. 」

「No...No! I didn't do much! 」

"There is a Cafe where monsters serve coffee"...This rumor spread throughout the God's realm. Since then, the Cafe De Celseus became a hit. It was busier than ever for the last two days.

Celseus was staring at the two of them with a serious look.

「I always saw everything with prejudice. Until now. But, John Dae and Kiriko. I was able to change my views when I met you both. As a Swordsman God, I was...Ughhh!？」

Suddenly, Celseus, who was talking seriously, blew away from us! He landed a few meters away from us! His condition was severe because he was foaming bubbles from his mouth!

「Ce...Celseus!? 」

「Mister Celseus!? 」

John Dae and Kiriko panicked and shouted extremely high. The place where Celseus was talking stood Seiya, who held his leg high. It seemed that Seiya hit Celseus with a powerful kick. John Dae screamed at Seiya upon seeing a fainted Celseus.

「Hey, why did you kick him all of a sudden!? 」

「It was a crappy story and it was going to take a long time to finish. So, I shortened the sentences.」

「Is that the reason why you kicked him like that!? You're awful!! 」

Seiya ignored John Dae's rants and talked to me.

「It looks like you're ready. Okay, let's go now. 」

「I...I understand. 」

I hated it when Seiya kicked others and me. But, I didn't say much and just agreed. Aria and Adenela came to see us off.

「Seiya. Lista. Good luck. 」

「Yes! Thank you, Aria! 」

I gave Aria a ring and other jewelry as gifts. Yes, some of the items I've bought from Bardul.

「We...Well, don't worry. Se...Seiya became mu...much stronger. The...There is no longer an...an enemy in...in any world that he...he won't be able to...to defeat...」

After I smiled back to Adenela, I stared at Seiya.

「Well then, Seiya. Are we going to Tarmine now? 」

「No. I want to reinforce the fortress that I built on the southern coast of Radral. 」

「Near Galvano, I see. Understood. 」

However, on this moment. John Dae asked Seiya the following question with a rare and apologetic expression on his face.

「I apologize, but I have one request. Can't we visit the northern territory of the Baracuda continent, on which was ruled by the Machine Emperor?」

「Why? 」

「Although the Killing Machines controlled that continent; perhaps, a few humans survived just like what happened with Tarmine.」

「Hmm... 」

Seiya was silent while he thought deeply about it...

「Mister Seiya...! If I could, I'd like to know what happened in the Baracuda continent...!」

After Kiriko spoke, Seiya nodded quietly. Although he was mostly cold and indifferent, Seiya was still a hero. He'd probably want to save others if there was a still life to be saved. I also felt the same way.

However, it was necessary to have the Great Goddess Isister's permission to open the portal to a place that we had never been before.

「Lista. I'll talk with Lady Isister. 」

Aria, who was listening to our conversation, closed her eyes as if she were meditating in order to speak with the Great Goddess Isister through her mind. After a while, Aria opened her eyes.

「Right now, Lady Isister gave you the permission to open the portal to the Baracuda continent. However...」

Aria spoke with a troubled complexion.

「Lady Isister told me that you probably won't find any surviving humans in the Baracuda continent...」

We sighed depressively upon hearing Aria's words. Even so, Seiya thought differently.

「Isister's prophetic eyes got weakened because of the evil god, right? She isn't 100% sure then. Therefore, we can't guarantee that there aren't any survivors. In fact, I will confirm that until I've seen it with my own eyes.」

「Tha...That's right! Seiya is correct! Let's go! 」

Both John Dae and Kiriko nodded positively. After that, Seiya made an earth snake enter the portal to check out the surroundings. After confirming the safety of the area, we finally dived in through the portal.

—

John Dae, Kiriko and I lost our words upon seeing the scene that spread right in front of us when we got out of the portal.

It was a vast area with absolutely nothing. It was a long burnt field. Moreover, we could see not only a few human bones, but also hundreds of them scattered everywhere.

...Ho...How terrible...! Perhaps, no human was alive after all...!

Meanwhile, Seiya spoke indifferently as usual.

「Well, it seems there isn't much hope. But, let's explore for now to see if we can find survivors. Maybe this place is the only badly affected area.」

And then, Seiya bent on his knees and put his hands on the ground. It seemed that he created earth snakes to explore the surroundings. John Dae asked Seiya.

「Although it is not as large as Radral, the Baracuda continent is a vast place. Won't it take a long time to investigate all areas?」

Nevertheless, on this precise moment, the ground rose in a circle around Seiya. Then, the mounds moved away from Seiya at a tremendous speed as if a large wave moved rapidly through the surface of the water.

「Because of my training with the Goddess of Earth, I succeeded in creating earth snakes that greatly improved on their movement. Their speed increased substantially. It won't take much time to know the current situation of this continent.」

Seiya closed his eyes. Apparently, he was watching everything by linking his eyes with the eyes of the countless earth snakes.

Occasionally, Seiya reported the situation as if he were a machine.

「...West. The area is full of corpses within the radius of 30 kilometers (EN: 18,64 miles).」

「...The same scenario for the northern region. No survivors detected. 」

After doing this for a while, Seiya looked as if he saw a terrible sight.

「Hey, Seiya. Are you all right? Isn't it too painful for you? 」

「Yeah. I'm sharing my vision with many earth snakes. It takes a toll on my nerve system. But, there's no big problem.」

「Ah, yes. Is that so... 」

Seeing a large number of human skeletons didn't seem to bother Seiya. In addition, he was worried about something totally different from my worries. Then, I noticed that Kiriko held her head low behind the focused Seiya.

Before I could talk to her, John Dae put his hand on Kiriko's shoulder.

「Are you okay, Kiriko? 」

「Father...No. The Machine Emperor Oxelio said that my real parents were dead. In other words, does that mean that my parents died on this land?」

John Dae was taken aback by her words.

「Tha...That's not necessarily true! I'm sure that some people survived this chaos! Among those people might be your parents!」

「I really hope so... 」

Kiriko felt depressed. I slowly approached her then. I squatted a little to look straight into Kiriko's face.

「Listen, Kiri. You are a very good-natured girl. And, a good girl will always have a wonderful future ahead of her.」

「A wonderful future, you say? 」

「Yes, that's right. 」

John Dae agreed with me.

「Yeah, that's correct! Perhaps we might find a way to transform Kiriko into a human being once again!」

「To...To become human again? 」

「There's hope! 」

「Are...Are you sure? If...If there is that possibility...I would be extremely happy...! 」

Then, Kiriko spoke with a bright tone.

「Thank you very much! I feel much better now! 」

However. This time. Seiya didn't turn around and spilled icy words.

「If you continue to do good things, you'll die without being rewarded. Besides, some villains do as they please and nobody judges them. Nothing is certain. Therefore, nobody knows what will happen in the future.」

John Dae began to yell after he heard those piercing words.

「Hey, you!! What the hell are you saying!! 」

I fully agreed! We tried our hardest to lift up Kiriko's mood, and yet, he ruined everything!

Seiya moved his neck slightly and stared at Kiriko with cold eyes.

「Kiriko. You are a machine. You must stop having high expectations that you may become a human one day.」

I couldn't stand this anymore.

「That's cruel, Seiya!! Why do you enjoy saying hurtful words!? 」

「The disappointment will be considerable if she finds out that it would be impossible for her to be human again. Will you take responsibility if that happens?」

「Tha...That's... 」

「Don't make promises that you can't keep. 」

And then, Seiya turned his back on me.

「Lista. Summon the portal. There's no use in being here. 」

「Eh...! Do...Don't tell me that...! 」

「I fully grasped the situation throughout the Baracuda continent. Isister was right. There are no survivors on this land. There's nothing here except bones and the Killing Machines' remnants scattered around the vast area.」

「Wa...Wait! You did your exploration in a very short time! Maybe you overlooked something significant!」

「I didn't overlook. My investigation is sure and perfect. There are no survivors.」

John Dae knew by his experience that Seiya's words were true. Both John Dae and I remained silent afterwards. However, Kiriko opened her mouth and uttered the following words.

「My father and mother are really dead after all... 」

「Well, I knew it from the beginning. This search for survivors is just a formality. Besides, you wouldn't recognize your parent's faces even if they were alive, am I correct?」

「Ri...Right...You're correct... 」

Then, Seiya changed his gaze from Kiriko to me.

「This is a waste of time. Okay, Lista. We're going to the fortress as originally planned. 」

「Se...Seiya! Just think a little about Kiri's feelings! 」

「My job is to save this world. 」

「It...It's fine, Miss Lista! Let's go to next place now! A...Actually...I don't want to be here anymore...」

「Kiri... 」

A frustrated John Dae kicked the soil with his feet. He didn't say much, but he probably thought to himself that, "I shouldn't have asked to explore the Baracuda continent in the first place".

With a feeling of closure, we headed to the southern coastline of the Radral continent.

Chapter 94: Walking Disaster

Queen Carmilla was gentle towards Kiriko as she put a light brown cloak over Kiriko's shoulder as if it were a blanket.

「I wanted to give you something more pretty, but it would stand out too much if it were too bright.」

「Ah, no! This cloak is lovely! Thank you very much! 」

At this precise moment, Kiriko, John Dae and I were at the Queen's residence, the Tarmine Palace.

Kiriko had regained her energy two days after we returned from the Baracuda continent. Queen Carmilla also helped on this regard. The Queen treated Kiriko with care and showed the surrounding soldiers that they didn't need to feel worried about her. Because of this event, a rumor spread throughout the Tarmine Kingdom that Kiriko wasn't a terrible monster.

John Dae spoke to Kiriko after she waved her new cloak in front of a full-length mirror.

「Kiriko! It's a great honor to receive a gift from the Queen! 」

「Yes! I am so happy that many people want me to feel better with myself! 」

The Queen spoke to me after we watched the two of them chatting happily.

「She's a very good and honest child. 」

「Yes, very! 」

「It's like...how do I put it... 」

The Queen gently shook her head with a smile. I think she remembered Princess Tiana when she was a young girl.

...Would the Queen believe me if I told her that I was Princess Tiana's reincarnation? I felt that, if the Queen accepted Kiriko, she would surely believe me. But...

「So, is the hero in Galvano again? 」

「Ye...Yes! Tha...That's right! 」

I spoke to the Queen with a bright and loud voice. The Queen responded to me with the following words.

「No days off. I wonder if he is all right. 」

「He's fine! We're talking about Seiya after all! 」

The Queen was worried about Seiya. But, I wasn't. It was because I knew perfectly well that it was normal for that hero to prepare in advance without a break.

ring ring ring ring

「Ah. Speaking of the devil, it's the snake mobile phone. 」

I took the earth snake from my chest and placed it on my ear.

「Lista. I got to return to Tarmine now. Summon the portal. 」

「Roger that. 」

I summoned the portal as I was told to. The door opened immediately and Seiya came out.

「So? How about the fortress? 」

「Yeah. I finally completed it today. 」

The other day, John Dae and I became speechless when we saw the fortress being built in the south of Galvano. Countless of golems were put on a watch position, while the rock wall was built through a vast area. In the center of the wall was a magnificent fort. I never imagined that Seiya could build something with such architectural design.

We left Seiya behind, who continued to reinforce the surrounding rock wall. But, before we returned to Tarmine, I noticed that the fortress was already complete. Perhaps the "completion" that Seiya referred to was probably around 120%.

Seiya walked up to the Queen when he saw her.

「Can I borrow this undead for the Ceremonial attack? 」

I was so surprised and shocked that I almost jumped when I saw that Seiya was pointing towards John Dae.

「Ehhh!? Seiya!! I can't believe that you're willing to take others with you!! 」

「Hmm, I see. So, you do need my help after all. Well, as long as you have the Queen's permission, there is no problem.」

Seiya ignored John Dae's response, and spoke to the Queen and me.

「He's an undead. Since he is somewhat cursed, there's less worry about him being cursed once again. And even if he gets cursed, or become disabled, he's just a zombie after all. What happens to him doesn't matter that much.」

When we heard the harsh truth, John Dae raised his voice.

「How dare you say something like that right in front of me!? 」

「That's right!! At least you should say his name, it's John Dae!! 」

「No!! That was not the point!! You guys are the worst!!...My Queen, please say something on my behalf!!」

「I don't know much about the undead. You can take whatever it pleases you. 」

「Even the Queen!? That's harsh!! 」

Seiya may be serious, but the Queen's amusing face said that it was a joke. After knowing that, Kiriko and I laughed happily.

...By the way, about the so-called "Emperor Ceremonial". I wondered if he'll bring a cursed monster army... I hoped that it wasn't something too dreadful and frightening...

In contrast to me, John Dae, who was chosen to accompany the hero as a fellow comrade, called one of his men guarding the front door.

「I have to be ready. Get the armor from my room. 」

「Yes! 」

Seiya stopped the guard, who saluted cheerfully, once he tried to go to John Dae's room.

「Hey, bring some tea as well. I'll need it if this guy begins to stink like a rotten zombie.」

「Yes! 」

「Hey, it's not "Yes!"!! Did you forget who your superior is!? Amory is more important than tea!!」

While John Dae was screaming at his subordinate, I noticed that Seiya was staring silently at Kiriko.

「Hey. What...is that thing? 」

「Eh! That's Kiri, you know? 」

Thanks to the Queen's cloak, Kiriko's metallic body was invisible to the human eye. I was kinda happy that Seiya didn't realize that it was Kiriko, since it meant that the cloak was a success. Still, Seiya was referring to something else.

「There's no need to wear something useless. I can change her into a human being with the power of my art of change.」

I see! So, she could transform into a young girl with Seiya's power? Why didn't I realize it before!

However, Kiriko felt that my flower pendant and the Queen's cloak would be meaningless if she changed completely. Therefore, Kiriko rejected Seiya's proposal.

「Sorry, but I...I want to stay in this form as much as possible. Because, this is my true appearance now after all...」

After a brief silence, Seiya muttered the following words.

「Okay, do as you please. 」

「I...I'm truly sorry. I didn't want to speak haughty words. 」

「That was what you decided for yourself. So, that's fine. 」

On this moment, the air became a little heavier. I felt that Seiya's body bounced sideways.

「Eh? Mister Seiya? 」

Not only me, but Kiriko noticed something strange as well.

「Are...Are you all right, Seiya!? Didn't you sway just now!? 」

Then...

alarm sound

Suddenly, an alarm sound quite different from the earth snake mobile phone rang on Seiya's chest! This sound was the same alarm sound that alerted us when the Imperial Machine Corps attacked Tarmine!

The earth snake, which Seiya took out of his upper armor, was trembling and making a weird noise. Apparently, it had a vibration function. So, this was the earth snake that made Seiya's body oscillate slightly.

「Seiya! Did something happened to Tarmine? 」

「No. The alarm of this earth snake came from the southern coast of the Radral continent.」

「Then, does that mean that the Ceremonics attacking forces crossed the sea!? 」

「Most probably. Wait a moment. 」

Seiya closed his eyes. It seemed that he connected his eyes with the earth snakes. After a while, he finally opened his mouth.

「It seems that a small boat is approaching the coast. Apparently, there is only a single person on that boat.」

「And...is that person Ceremonic? 」

「I don't know. 」

The Queen twisted her neck when she heard what was happening.

「Does a mighty monster that rules an entire continent come here by rowing a small boat? If he was planning to attack us, wouldn't he bring a whole army of monsters with him?」

「Yeah. I thought the same. That's why I built a strong fortress. But, I can't say for sure if that single person is Ceremonic or not.」

「Excuse me, hero. What does that person look like? 」

「I don't know. 」

「Why is your information too sparse since a while ago? Is the boat too far in the distance? 」

Then, Seiya wrinkled between his eyebrows.

「I don't want to see it clearly. I might get cursed just by looking directly at it. I don't want to be turned into a stone.」

「Wa...Wait a moment, Seiya. How can you get cursed if you can't even see if that person is Ceremonic or not?」

I spoke with a small grin on my face, but Seiya was serious.

「There was a video, which came out of a rental store of my world, that cursed the person who saw it. I should consider the possibility of the curse being activated when you see it.」

No, that was just a cheap imitation to scare other people. There was no way that you'd find a cursed video in a rental store...But, I couldn't argue with him, and I just nodded silently.

「Anyway. I'm going to the fortress to analyze it closer. Lista. Open the portal. 」

I didn't think it was Ceremonic. Yet, the whole scene was quite suspicious. After I invoked the portal, I stared at Kiriko.

「Listen, Kiri. What do you want do to? Do you want to stay here? 」

「I...I am also a comrade! I will go with you! 」

Kiriko put her hands on her chest vigorously. I nodded and the Queen smiled.

「Miss Goddess, you don't have to worry about Tarmine. There's a lot a golems here. Besides, we also have the huge goddess protecting us from outside the walls.」

「All right! Okay, we'll go now! 」

「Well, even though that thing is just a big junk. 」

「It's not a "junk"!! 」

—

As instructed, I opened the portal that was connected to the inside of the fortress, Seiya opened the door and went in, John Dae, Kiriko and I followed him.

We kept following Seiya, as he walked through a dungeon-like passage made inside of the rock wall...

「Hey. It's a dead end. 」

John Dae spoke after we arrived at rock wall that blocked our way. On this precise instant, my feet began to shake slowly.

「Wha...What!? 」

I felt a floating sensation so abruptly! My field of vision swayed up and down! It continued for a while and then it stopped immediately.

「It was like an elevator. We are now in the basement of the fortress. 」

「Basement, you say!? 」

The fortress built by Seiya was so strong that it seemed like it had a tremendous defensive power. But, I wondered if he was actually arranging a shelter in the basement of the fortress. I thought that I was used to Seiya's cautious attitude, and yet, I was surprised once again.

Seiya walked through the underground passage much to our surprise. Eventually, a door made of wood appeared right in front of me.

When I entered inside, I was astonished even further.

It was a large room illuminated with the magical stones. There were countless of water buckets inside the room. The buckets reflected several different zones, such as the sea, the flatlands and the surroundings of the fortress. In addition, I noticed that Seiya created a stone-like deck at a distance, and a large number of earth snakes were pierced on the deck like microphones. This surveillance room, which was created for the battle against the next Emperor, looked like a military command room.

「...Hmm. 」

Seiya stared at one of the water buckets and frowned. I also looked at the video of the earth snake camera and I was shaken.

「The...The boat is empty...? 」

The earth snake camera showed that the small-unmanned boat reached the shore.

...The person who was on the boat...already arrived in the Radral continent!

「It's strange. Although I didn't see that person clearly, my earth snakes would've alerted me about a possible arrival.」

「Se...Seiya! Where did that person go? 」

「Don't fret. I have countless of earth snakes out there. I will find him immediately. 」

Then, Seiya gave a quick glance at John Dae.

「John Dae. It's your turn. 」

「Gre...Great! 」

Seiya stopped John Dae who stood up with his sword.

「What are you doing? 」

「Eh!? Weren't you saying to get rid of it!? 」

「No. Your job is to find that person on the earth snake monitors. 」

「That's just it!? 」

「In addition to a video curse, there may be an audio curse as well. There's a danger of being cursed just by listening to it. First, you have to see it and listen to it. Then, you can tell me about it afterwards. So, try it.」

「Am I a "taster for poison"...!? 」

「Never mind about that. Just look at the buckets. Bring yourself closer and watch carefully from the earth snakes monitors.」

John Dae looked at the water buckets with hesitation. And then, he slowly spoke the following words.

「...The person is walking towards the fortress. The person standing in front of the wall looks like a human woman...but...with two faces...」

At first, John Dae's voice was intrigued, but soon, his tone became serious.

「I've never seen a monster like that before. Maybe that woman is Ceremonic. 」

「How do you know that? You can't use clairvoyance, am I right? I've done a bit of research, but I didn't find much information about Ceremonic. You can't make a judgment based on its appearance alone.」

「No. I'm certain that that monster is Ceremonic. It's the most ominous monster that I've encountered on the battlefield so far. The grass is dying while she walks on it.」

Although he was bullied and abashed by Seiya, John Dae was still a war veteran general. His words sounded real and true.

「...So, what about your symptoms? 」

「Stop reminding me of that. If you're talking about the curse, I don't see any particular changes in me.」

Seiya nodded positively after a while.

「Okay. It seems that the curse won't activate if you see it or hear the voice. John Dae, you can go home now.」

「I'm not going home now!! Don't joke with me!! 」

After he pushed an angry John Dae aside, Seiya began to look carefully at the water bucket. Kiriko and I also looked behind his back.

A woman walking with a dirty long dress entered my field of vision. On the next bucket, I could see the full close-up image of this person. It was a woman with a long and dark hair. It looked quite disturbed to me...and...the other woman's head had a dark hair as well but was beautifully arranged! As John Dae described, it was a woman with two faces in one body!

The disturbed dark-haired woman began to shout aloud.

「Big sis Monica! You did it again! 」

The woman with the beautiful hair responded with a calm voice.

「It wasn't me. Serena. You were the one who did it. I just crushed Shanak's eyes. 」

「But, I just broke Shanak's nose, you know! 」

Wha...What! They were arguing about some weird story...! So creepy...!

「Serena. More importantly. Now our duty is to finish off the hero, and not the dead Shanak. I heard that both the Beast Emperor the Grand Lion and the Machine Emperor Oxelio were defeated. Don't let your guard down.」

「Who cares. By the way, I wonder if that bastard hero will be surprised by us? After all, we came here by ourselves.」

「Well, the real strong being is the one that acts in a small numbers. But, Serena. He won't be that surprised...」

On this moment, one of the heads moved its eyes towards the monitor! My eyes quivered when our gaze met with one another!

「The hero is already listening to our conversation. 」

I shook Seiya's body while my hands trembled incessantly.

「Se...Se...Seiya!! They're aware of us!? 」

「Yeah. Let's move the earth snake further away from that spot. I shall put it with a distance of 30 meters apart between the monitor and that thing.」

「Tha...That's really far away! That's such a high-performance camera! 」

Nonetheless. Seiya stopped his movement when he tried to give the new instructions to the earth snake camera.

「...Hmm. Fast. 」

「Eh? 」

When I heard those words, I saw a huge and stagnant big one eye that was projected through the earth snake camera!

「Gyaaa!! 」

「Hiiiiii!! 」

Kiriko and I were so startled that we screamed extremely high! This must've happened when we moved our eyes away from the camera for a very brief moment. At this precise moment, the two heads were reflected on the camera of the water bucket. The woman with the arranged hair and the woman with the disturbed hair spoke alternately.

「Nice to meet you, hero. I am the Empress Ceremonic. 」

「Noooo! Big sis Monica! You're too polite! I am the fearsome one! I am the Empress Ceremonic!」

Then, the two heads laughed wickedly at us.

「From now on, I will defeat you in order to avenge the death of my younger sister Shanak.」

「I will kill you with the curse. You'll suffer, suffer, and suffer a lot... Until you die!」

Chapter 95: Even Falling (1)

Suddenly, the clear image of the water bucket turned into a sandstorm. Perhaps, Ceremonic destroyed the earth snake camera. Still, there was many more earth snakes intact. From a different angle, we could see that Ceremonic began walking further ahead.

Kiriko grabbed the hem of my dress and asked the following question.

「She...She said she was going to avenge the death of her younger sister, right? What does that mean?」

「Maybe Ceremonic had a monster sister that Seiya and I defeated when we first arrived in Exfolia...」

Nevertheless, Seiya defeated only the beast men and the Killing Machines since we've arrived. No...Was there a possibility that Seiya killed Ceremonic's sister during the last time he tried to save Exfolia...!?

Kiriko and I were thinking deeply about Ceremonic's behavior and words. However, it seemed that Seiya was thinking about something completely different. He had an expression that looked as if he had bored eyes.

「That's not the biggest problem now. By the way, Lista. Can you see that thing's status?」

「Eh! Status? 」

After being told to see the enemy's status, I activated my clairvoyance ability to see the abilities of Ceremonic through one of the earth snakes cameras. However, I couldn't see any numbers.

「It...It's no use! I can't see anything! 」

「I knew it. I tried to see it as well. But, I couldn't see any of that thing's abilities. There must be a reason for this. There are several possibilities. It might be because of the distance, since we're extremely far. It might be because we're watching through an earth snake monitor instead of seeing it for real. It might be due to the activation of a camouflage skill. Or, it might be because of the cursing aura that comes out of that thing's body.」

Either way, it was creepy and frightening that we couldn't know anything about our enemy. In addition, Ceremonic herself looked extremely terrifying. She incited fear upon us. Seeing a womanly monster with two heads walking straight ahead made me feel so scared that I held Kiriko's hand, who in turn also grabbed my dress tight.

I spoke aloud to encourage Kiriko and myself.

「Bu...But, Ceremonic is just a single enemy! Besides! Seiya! You have a lot of golems around the fortress, am I right?」

「Yeah. There are roughly 2,000 bodies in position. 」

Seiya pointed to one of the earth snakes cameras, which showed the front of the fortress. We could see a huge amount of golems on that reflected image. That number got confirmed. After seeing it, both Kiriko and I were slightly relieved.

Nevertheless, our enemy Ceremonic walked alone without a care in the world through the fortress' grounds regardless of the golems' presence. Of the two-heads monster, the one with disturbed hair had a disgusted expression on her face.

「That's a great number of golems. When did he prepare this much? Just how cautious and coward is this hero?」

「Well, it's actually an honor for us if you put it in a different perspective. He must think that the Empress Ceremonic is a real threat. However...It's a pity, but this won't be much of a fight for us.」

「You're right. Thousands of obstacles are nothing. 」

Then, the two heads spoke at the same time.

「Stealth Step. 」

Just when I blank my eyes on for moment...Ceremonic had disappeared from the monitor! I tried to look for her in several water buckets! I tried over and over, but I could only see the fortress and the golems!

「...Over there. 」

Seiya was standing at a corner a little bit further away from us. The image of the earth snake camera, taken from the "bird's-eye view" at the top of the fortress, showed that Ceremonic was standing right at the entrance.

John Dae and I were astonished upon seeing this sight.

「Im...Impossible....!! When did she get there...!? 」

「It can't be!! How did that monster passed through the golems' defense unit!?」

The woman with the disturbed hair noticed the location of the earth snake camera at the top of the fortress' entrance. She spoke directly to the camera.

「*laughs maniacally* Can you see us now? I will cut off your throat and neck with our instant movement!」

「You know, Serena. Why do you have to mention the secret of our ability? 」

「Ahhh, my bad! 」

「I don't really mind it. I can't prevent you from talking after all. 」

I freaked out when I heard the conversation between the Ceremonical sisters.

「Instant movement...Then, does that mean that she could teleport herself from that faraway area to this place all of a sudden!?!」

At first, I was quite relieved that we had a strong fortress and a powerful backup army in defense. But, suddenly, this situation felt as if a blade pierced my back.

John Dae pulled the sword out of his sheath. Kiriko and I looked at our surroundings because we were too frightened. Ceremonical could appear right at our side in a blink of an eye.

However, Seiya was the only one that remained calm.

「Don't fret. It may be teleportation, but that doesn't mean that she can go whenever she wants. If that was possible, why didn't she appear right next to Lista and me when we were in Tarmine? In the first place, she wouldn't cross the sea with a boat to reach this continent if she really had a teleportation skill. There's gotta be some limit to her mobility.」

「Limit? 」

「It's just my assumption. Either she can only move on a continuous direction...or she can move to a location that where she must see it first...Well, the countermeasures differ depending on whether you are jumping over the space or moving at a speed close to the speed of light.」

Seiya moved his nose with his arms folded.

「Either way, it's a feasible hypothesis. So, I don't see any problem at all. 」

John Dae, Kiriko and I looked at each other. After a while, John Dae relaxed his mouth, laughed a little bit 「Ah, ah. 」 , and put the sword back on its sheath. The heavy air loosened a bit.

...Ceremonical had a creepy and perturbing appearance and behavior. She could use a teleportation skill as well. Normally, it wouldn't be too abnormal to feel panic. Yet, Seiya didn't look upset.

We heard that we shouldn't underestimate the cursed Empress Ceremonical. Even so, this hero wasn't that concerned nor did he lose his sense.

「That thing just flew right into the middle of "fire". I will let her taste the power of my strong fortress to her heart's content.」

I was so relieved to witness Seiya's confident posture as if he were a true boss.

...Tha...That's right! Any enemy wouldn't stand a chance against Seiya! And, if by any chance the enemy was too powerful, Seiya would defeat it with his State Berserk Phase 2.7! There was absolutely nothing to fear!

On this moment.

bangggggg

Abruptly I heard a violent sound.

When I looked at that sound's direction, I realized that Seiya plunged his face in the bucket of an earth snake camera.

「...Ah? 」

I was speechless. Seiya kept his face completely in the water bucket and didn't make even a slight movement. It was like a goofy scene of a comedic act.

「He...Hey...What the hell is wrong with him? Is he joking around? 」

「Uh...What are you doing, Seiya? 」

Neither John Dae nor I were able to understand the situation. Kiriko rushed to Seiya's direction and shook his body.

「Mister Seiya! Mister Seiya! Please, hang in there! 」

「No, no, no. Kiri, you have the wrong idea. There's no way that Seiya would fall unconscious like this.」

Kiriko pushed Seiya's body to her side, and we saw that Seiya's eyes were closed. It was as if he collapsed after losing all of his strength. Kiriko put Seiya on the ground with both of her hands, and with her face, she touched Seiya's chest.

「He is breathing! There is also a heartbeat! But, he's not conscious! 」

I laughed at Kiriko, who was feeling quite desperate.

「It's okay, it's okay! He's acting again! Just like the same way as he did with Oxelio! 」

「Hmm. But, we don't know anything about the hero's intention for doing this....How about we wake him up?」

But, Seiya kept his eyes closed. Kiriko pulled the hem of my dress hurriedly.

「Miss Lista! Miss Lista! Hurry up and check Mister Seiya's status! 」

I activated my clairvoyance ability because Kiriko told me urgently to do it...

Ryuguuin Seiya

Profession – Magic Warrior (Earth Attribute)

Level – 99 (MAX)

HP – 321960

MP – 88155

Attack – 293412

Defense – 287644

Agility – 268875

Magic – 58751

Potential – 999 (MAX) ...

「See? There's no reason to fret. His HP is full... 」

I realized something odd as soon as I spoke those words.

No...No. Wait a second!! How could I see through Seiya's status when he always hid it with his camouflage skills!? In...In other words, this meant that....!!

「It can't be!! Seiya!? 」

I finally realized the seriousness of this situation. I rapidly approached Seiya and embraced him.

「Why!? Just why!? This has never happened before!! 」

Next to me, I noticed that John Dae's face became "blue".

「Do...Don't tell me that this was Ceremonie's curse!? The hero said that a curse could activate if one looked directly at Ceremonie's appearance, right!?」

「Curse!? But, if that's true, why are we okay!? 」

Both John Dae and I were confused and started panicking...

「...Maybe it wasn't a curse. 」

Kiriko's calm voice echoed around. After I took a deep breath, I asked Kiriko the following question.

「The...Then, Kiri. What do you think that made Seiya this way? 」

「His heart was suffering. That's why he fell down. 」

「Su...Suffering? Seiya, you say? 」

「Yes...That's correct... 」

Kiriko gently stroked Seiya's glossy black hair.

「I think he has been enduring everything on his own. Mister Seiya...I had that feeling since we came back from the heavenly world and saw the human bones in the Baracuda continent...No. Actually, I felt Seiya's hardships and loneliness since the very moment I've met him...」

「Kiri. You...!? 」

How did a machine like Kiriko managed to feel something as deep as that...While I was immersed on my own thoughts, I heard a combination of two loud voices.

「Grudge Hand! 」

These voices came simultaneously out of the earth snake camera! When I looked at it, I saw that Ceremonic touched a golem with her right palm! Once she touched it, the golem turned into sand immediately! On that instant, three golems tried to attack Ceremonic! But, it was in vain because all of them turned into sand upon touching the hands of Ceremonic! When the golems, which were protecting the entrance of the fortress, were wiped out, Ceremonic began to laugh as a mad woman!

「This fight was too boring. It would be far more interesting if it were a human instead. I would love to see some limbs fall apart and lose lots of blood spilled everywhere.」

「Don't worry, Serena. You'll see it soon. You'll enjoy the moment where the hero and his fellow comrades will beg pitifully for their lives as they die slowly and painfully...」

Ugh! What a horrible and creepy enemy we've got here! There was no way that we could overcome this perilous situation without Seiya!

「I'm going to summon the portal! We should take Seiya with us and retreat to the God's realm! John Dae! Please, hold Seiya for now!」

「Yeah! 」

I invoked the portal to the God's realm. When I hurryingly opened the door...I was utterly shocked. A white wall blocked the portal's door.

「Thi...This is...the power of the Cursed Sphere...!! 」

My brain freaked out without knowing what to do...

Chapter 95: Even Falling (2)

The power of the Cursed Sphere.

No way!! Don't tell me that Ceremonic put a Cursed Sphere in her body like Bunogeos did to himself!? Summing up...We won't be able to return to the God's realm as long as we're near Ceremonic!?

「Goddess! If we can't go back to the God's realm, why don't we go to Tarmine instead? The hero might recover if we take him there for a short moment! It's regrettable, but we can't do anything without his help!」

「Ye...Yes... 」

Then, I opened the portal to lead us back to Tarmine. During the quest to defeat the Grand Lion, I managed to move between places in this earthly world even if I couldn't go back to the God's realm. But...I trembled incessantly once I opened the door! The white wall stood right in front of me! It didn't disappear!

「Ugh...! Don't tell me that it's impossible to escape from this place...! 」

John Dae groaned bitterly right next to me. Then, he approached Seiya who was still unconscious and shook his shoulders.

「Hey! Wake up! Get up now! 」

「Ple...Please, stop it! Mister John Dae! Mister Seiya must rest now! 」

「We can't let him take a rest! Just look over there! 」

John Dae pointed out to an earth snake camera that showed the current position of the Empress Ceremonic. She stood in a new place as opposed to where she was at previously.

「Big sis Monica. It looks like a dead end. 」

She was standing in the area where we came down to this military basement!? I...I couldn't believe that she got there so fast!!

She must've used her instant movement ability with teleportation skills. I stared silently at the ceiling of the rock wall. Perhaps, Ceremonic was only a few meters above from us!

We were staring at the top of the ceiling and at the earth snake camera alternately, without stopping. Soon, Ceremonic left the place where she was standing still.

As soon as I took a deep breath as sign of relief, I heard the voice of the other Ceremonic sister from the water bucket.

「Serena. There's a staircase leading to a basement. 」

And then, Ceremonic went to the stairs. I wondered if she noticed the earth snake camera that was installed in the passage along the way. The sister with the disturbed hair put out her tongue.

「I'm coming to get you! I can't wait to cut your neck! *laughs maniacally* What kind of curse should I use?」

「How about a curse that drains every drop of blood from his body while he's alive?」

「A curse that will rot his flesh in a gruesome way is a good alternative too! He has to feel a dreadful and excruciating pain!」

John Dae raised his voice as soon as Ceremonic disappeared from the angle of the earth snake camera.

「This is bad! She found the staircase that leads to this basement! She'll be here soon! 」

「Wha...What should we do now...! 」

My body was full of sweat and my breathing became rough! We're doomed if she finds us here! Seiya and all of us would be annihilated instantly!

...We couldn't even run away from here...Ahhhhh!! What should I doooooo!?

I started to panic, then...

slurping sound

Suddenly, something small came out of the ground!

「Gyaaaa!! Is it Ceremonic!? 」

「Ple...Please calm down, Miss Lista! It's Mister Seiya's earth snake! 」

「Huh...? Ah...You're right... 」

「It has something on its mouth. 」

After John Dae noticed that detail, the earth snake offered me a piece of paper that came from its mouth.

「Eh... 」

The following sentences were written on the paper.

—

『Lista. If you're reading this, then something happened to my body during the quest to defeat Ceremonic. I hate to think about it this way, but I can't deny a possible scenario where I die.』

John Dae and Kiriko were both reading the sentences from behind my back. John Dae spoke with a startling voice after he read the word "die".

「Wha...What the hell is this? Is this paper a...proof of his will? 」

「No! Seiya is still alive...! 」

I heard that some people wrote their own wills before they died. But, I never got bothered with it, because I never had a reason to care about my "possible death" since I'd never die...No! This wasn't the right time to think deeply about it! I had to get focused in order to read more of it!

『I usually pay careful attention to my health since the first day I began this journey.... Even so, there are some circumstances where I can't prevent, such as sudden illnesses, natural disasters, or accidents. So, that's why I wrote this piece of paper in case I got plagued by any of those reasons.』

John Dae yelled on my ears.

「We don't have the time to read such a melancholic letter now!! Ceremonic is heading down through the staircase at this precise moment!!」

「Wa...Wait a minute, John Dae! Look at this part! 」

『Well, the fortress might be under attack, and our enemy Ceremonic might be in the midst of heading towards the basement room where you are standing still. Regardless of that scenario, you should keep reading this letter.』

「How could he be exactly on point!? Some...Somehow, it's frightening me!! 」

「Anyways, Miss Lista! Let's keep reading the letter! 」

『Ceremonic thinks that she has cornered you. But, she doesn't realize that it was me who cornered her. Listen carefully. The fortress itself is a huge trap. Actually, she defeated the thousands of golems outside

of the fortress and reached the stairs that lead to the basement floor...This was almost impossible to accomplish if she weren't a powerful monster. That's why I created this place to be a huge set-up ground. In other words, I created a completely different area for the staircase passage. Even a powerful monster won't be able to avoid it. Ceremonic is descending the staircase to hell. The entrance up to the staircase is a labyrinth made of thirty underground layers that I've created with earth magic.』

「Eh...? Thirty...underground layers...? 」

John Dae, Kiriko and I looked attentively at the ceiling of the basement room.

I thought that Ceremonic was reaching this place extremely soon!! But, this basement room where we were now was the lowest layer of a long and deep underground labyrinth!?

『Actually, I think that the probability that I'm dead is relatively low. But, for whatever reason, I'm incapable of moving or talking. So, let me tell you this. If you act steadily according to the instructions I give you, then it will be possible for you to defeat Ceremonic on your own.』

There was a written sign at the end of the paper sheet.

『Perfectly Ready. 』

Chapter 96: Cautious Instructions

After reading the sheet of paper, I stared closely at an unconscious Seiya.

...No, you know...How was he "Perfectly Ready" with that state...? Wasn't this occurrence quite bizarre...?

While I was engrossed with my own thoughts...

「Miss Lista!! Look at that!! 」

Kiriko was pointing towards a different place. I was fully astonished when I saw it.

All of the images that we saw on the water buckets changed dramatically! It seemed that the earth snake cameras outside of the fortress retreated immediately! All of the images transformed into videos that showed an underground labyrinth! Furthermore, there was a button-like projection that I've never seen before on a rock desk!

「The military basement room just changed into a dungeon room that connects to a huge underground labyrinth...!」

John Dae spoke with a stunned expression on his face.

「We are at the bottom of the labyrinth. It seems that we're at the 30th basement level. That means that we aren't in immediate danger. However, it was written on that paper that if we follow the instructions, we'll be able to defeat Ceremonie even though the hero has fallen. But, how can we follow his instructions?」

Then, the earth snake, who brought the letter buried in the ground, dived into the floor as if it understood John Dae's words. After a few seconds, the earth snake appeared again but with a scroll attached to its body.

「Is...Is this the instructions? 」

The moment I tried to pick it up, dozens of earth snakes with scrolls came out of the ground!

screams

I was so shocked that I yelled aloud. Then, the earth snakes went to a specific area and gathered all of those scrolls together on that spot. Before long, those scrolls transformed into a mountain of endless scrolls.

「He must be kidding me! Are all of these scrolls his instructions!? 」

John Dae shouted in astonishment. And, I agreed with his surprise. I mean, when he had the time to write that large amount of instructions in the first place!? Actually, wasn't it natural that he fell down with fatigue and overwork by doing all of this!?

After I gazed fixedly at Seiya with stunned eyes, an earth snake gave me a scroll. There was a sentence written inside.

『If I'm dead, advance to Page 108. If I'm not dead, advance to Page 266.』

「Wha...What is this!? This thing looks like a Game Book!! 」

「Game Book!? Goddess!! What is that!? 」

「It's a type of book that was extremely popular a long time ago in Seiya's world! Choices usually appear in the middle of the text, and you'll advance to the page that matched with your choice! Since the creation of interactive games that could be played on TV, the Game Book became completely out of use!」

「Ah, I don't know what you're talking about!! 」

「You were the one who asked me about it!! 」

「Yo...You both! Please, calm down! Anyway, let's proceed to the page as instructed by Mister Seiya!」

「It's Page 266 because Seiya is alive...Shall we search for it? 」

I was taken aback when I stared at the huge pile of scrolls. But then, I heard a noise and saw that an earth snake was bringing a specific scroll on its mouth. I picked up the scroll. It had the number "266" written at the bottom of the page.

Ah. The earth snakes would bring me the specific scroll if I spoke the number of the page aloud. How convenient.

I read the following text.

『I want you to abandon your idea of "let's wait until he regains his consciousness", just because I'm not dead, there's a possibility that I'm bedridden. But, you have the will to defeat the Emperor Ceremonie on your own. Well, I'll tell you what to do from now on. Don't worry, my instructions are so easy to understand that even monkeys would understand it perfectly.』

It was rude of him to compare us with monkeys...!

『I'll start with a brief explanation about the underground labyrinth. There aren't any traps from the top floor to the 5th floor. It has a maze-like configuration. This is time-consuming, but I want you to be familiar with the labyrinth system for the time being. I want you to read the scrolls that the earth snakes will bring to you from now on. I hope that I can answer your questions with my instructions.』

Kiriko and I obediently received the scroll manual that the earth snake gave us. Yet, John Dae headed for a monitor set up in a water bucket.

「John Dae? 」

「No matter how much he is a visionary hero, there's no way that he'll predict every possible scenario. Besides, didn't he write those scrolls before he even met Ceremonic? There's no guarantee that we'll succeed. So, I'll keep an eye on Ceremonic's movements.』

「Bu...But, Mister John Dae! Just look at this! This part says, "Proceed to Page 68 if Ceremonic has an instant movement skill"!』

「Im...Impossible!! How could he foresee that!? 」

「I'm sure that he thought about several possibilities before he met Ceremonic. It seems that Mister Seiya has an incredible foresight. Ah, it says other things! If Ceremonic is a beast type proceed to Page 2687, if it is a vampire type proceed to Page 4743, and then...Here! In the case it is a two-faced type proceed to Page 7878!』

「What the hell is that!! That's no longer a matter of foresight!!』

「C'mon! Just shup up! All right! John Dae, you should keep a watch on Ceremonic from now on!』

After that, Kiriko and I continued to read the scroll manual and we proceeded to make choices according to Seiya's options...After a while, John Dae shouted to us.

「Hey! Ceremonic is going down the stairs to the 6th floor! She cleared the maze so quickly!』

She moved a lot faster than what I expected. Of course, she must've used her instant movement skill to teleport rapidly. However, Kiriko and I had already finished reading the scroll manual by then.

I approached John Dae and I peeked at the water bucket. From what I saw from the video, the 6th level was a simple passage with only two corners next to a staircase. It was quite simple when compared to the previous level, which was complex like a labyrinth.

Of the two heads, the disturbed-haired Serena spoke with an annoyingly tone.

「It was a long maze. 」

The other head, big sis Monica, replied to her.

「But, we moved instantaneously through it...Ah? What is this sound? 」

My eyes moved to the side corner of the video upon seeing something odd. A huge round rock was rolling towards Ceremonic! But, she wasn't that surprised or upset!

「Eh, did he set up rolling rock traps? What should we do? I can't see the other side because it's blocked by that rolling rock, and I can't teleport because I don't have any visibility.」

I realized it when I heard Serena's words.

Seiya guessed it right! So, that meant that Ceremonic could only "move to a location where she must see it first"!

In the meantime, Ceremonic turned around to avoid getting hit by the rolling rock! But then, she noticed that another huge rock was rapidly approaching her from the other side!

「Okay! She's gonna get crushed by those rocks! 」

John Dae spoke with a joyful tone...

「Up there, Serena. We'll make it through if we consider the diameter of the rock. 」

She disappeared for a brief moment...When I thought that she was gone for real, I noticed that Ceremonic was clinging up to the ceiling of the passage.

「Ugh! She dodged the rocks! 」

「She...She looks like a spider...! 」

The two rolling rocks didn't crush Ceremonic. They just collided with one another and stopped moving because of the direct impact. John Dae was trembling with frustration, while Ceremonic laughed triumphantly. But, on this moment, I pushed the button on the deck.

roaring sound

John Dae wavered his body upon hearing a tremendous roar. The video in the water bucket became pure white as if it were covered with smoke.

「Wha...What was that just now!? 」

「It is Seiya's instructions. It was written, "press the button if the enemy avoids the rolling rocks". Those rocks are a remotely controlled Bakudan Rock.」

「That means that he assumed that this enemy could avoid those rocks...! So, that's why he created remotely controlled Bakudan Rocks...! Just how paranoid is he...!?」

We stared at different angles from the videos shown by the earth snake cameras. Before long, we could see that Ceremonic's dress was torn apart because of the explosion. Serena screamed aloud.

「It hurts...My back hurts a lottttt!! 」

「Calm down, Serena. It's just a little burn. 」

「Da...Damn it...!! I won't forgive him for this...!! I will kill the hero, the hero's comrades, and every single human left on this continent!! I'll kill them all!!」

Serena was cursing and swearing at us. I was scared, but I tried not to listen to her rants. Therefore, I asked Kiriko the following question.

「Kiri. What's next? 」

「Well, let's see. "If a physical attack works on the enemy, go to Page 8193"...」

I read the new instructions brought by a new earth snake.

—

『After crossing level 7th, a myriad of arrows are set as traps to inflict damage on Ceremonic. It's time to move the enemy to a corner. There should be a time lag until the teleportation skill is activated again. Aim at it and press the button to summon the beehive.』

—

Ceremonic went down the stairs from the 7th to the 8th level on the underground labyrinth. The burns on her back weren't that serious.

...At the 8th level. In front of Ceremonic's eyes, the ground raised up violently. It was clearly a trap.

Ceremonic used her instant movement to make a shortcut. She reappeared at the corner of the screen. After she turned around and proceeded ahead by walking a few steps, Ceremonic's complexion changed dramatically. Suddenly, small holes appeared on the wall.

I pressed the button as instructed by Seiya. As soon as I pushed it, countless of arrows were released from the small holes and directed towards Ceremonic! It was useless to run away! The absurd amount of arrows attacked Ceremonic from the front, back, left and right sides!

As Seiya predicted, she took a longer time to activate her skill. Ceremonic was protecting both of her heads with her arms crossed.

...It was really like a beehive. Even so, Ceremonic stood still after the rain of arrows finished attacking her. Under her feet was a huge pile of broken arrows.

...Ugh! Her defense power was high! None of those arrows managed to pierce her body!

Serena spoke after spitting to the floor.

「Hmm. That was just a scratch. 」

「No, it wasn't, Serena. The arrows were poisoned. We have to burn the wounds right now in order to prevent it from spreading any further...」

「Ugh! That bastard hero...! 」

After a while, Ceremonic, on which she appeared on the 9th level, proceeded slowly to see if there were no traps. She didn't use her instant movement skill of teleportation.

I looked at Seiya's instructions.

—

『From now on, Ceremonic will continue to dive in the underground labyrinth with cautiousness because of subsequent traps. However, there aren't any traps on this level.』

—

Monica's face, which was tense at the beginning, suddenly brightened up.

「Serena! I see the next staircase! 」

「Yeah! There was nothing on this area! Damn it, how does he dare to play with us like this... 」

However, the moment she touched the first step of the stairs...

「Gyahhhhhh!! 」

Ceremonic screamed extremely high! Countless of needle-like swords stuck out from the floor of the stairs imperceptibly!

John Dae was shuddering upon watching this sight.

「So, there was a trap on the stairs that connected the 8th level with the 9th level...!」

「This...This really took me by surprise! 」

「Well, let's see. According to the supplement of his instructions, that trap is made of "powerful needles using the material of the Platinum Sword"...」

Ceremonic shouted aloud in a form of extreme rage. I noticed that a large amount of black blood dripped from her feet.

「Damn you herooooo!! 」

Afterwards, a variety of traps was set up on the next underground level, the 10th level. Pitfalls...Spears coming out of the walls...And the place where Ceremonic finally managed to arrive after dodging some of the traps was, however, a dead end. The mud wall had a forehead drawn on it with some kind of ornaments. A sentence was written there.

『Four legs in the morning...two legs at noon...three legs at night. Please write the answer of this creature's name.』

A pen was placed under the forehead. Ceremonic's younger sister Serena twisted her neck in confusion.

「What a bothersome game. The next staircase won't appear if we don't solve this damn mystery...But, what's the answer? I have no clue.」

Still, Monica raised the corner of her mouth.

「I know what the answer is. 」

「Really, big sis Monica! 」

「Yes. The answer is... 」

bang

Suddenly, there was a roaring sound coming from that weird forehead! The video of the earth snake camera was also disturbed!

Just when I thought out loud, 「What was that!? 」 , an earth snake came to me with a different scroll.

『At the end of the 10th level is a "trap that explodes while the enemy is thinking about solving the problem". By the way, the answer is "Human". That's all.』

I felt something cold that spread throughout my spine.

「Wha...What a completely outrageous trap! 」

「Ye...Yes! This type of trap showed the bad character of a human being!」

Even though that trap wasn't exactly created with fair play in mind, the effect was successful. Ceremonic's left wrist disappeared because of the explosion!

「My...My hand isssssss...!」

When I looked closely at her, I noticed that, besides losing her left hand, the burn on her back spread further on her skin, and her legs were also injured! She became a mess!

「Great! If it keeps going like this, we'll be able to get rid of her without much difficulty before she reaches the 30th level!」

I nodded in agreement to John Dae's words. As I slipped through the scroll manual, I saw that the upcoming traps were going to become more intense and more treacherous after the 10th level.

...As expected of Seiya! He was Perfectly Ready even after falling unconscious! It really seemed that we could defeat this enemy on our own!

...After she lost her left hand, the wall that exploded collapsed into fragments and the passage to the next 11th level appeared.

After seeing it...

laughs maniacally

One of the Ceremonic sisters laughed mischievously.

「Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!! 」

「Wha...What's going on, big sis Monica? 」

「Ridiculous. This is extremely ridiculous. We don't have the need to keep playing with the hero's stupid game, not anymore...」

「But, we won't reach them if we don't go through the stairs, am I right? Aren't they at the bottom floor?」

「It's fine, Serena. We don't need those stairs. Just...Yes, that's right. We only need a new power that will allow us to go to the lowest floor where the hero is hiding. Yes, just like the same time when we gained the new power by killing our young sister Shanak.」

Ceremonic's right hand grabbed Serena's face.

「No...No way!! You're kidding, right!? Big sis Monica!? 」

「Serena. This time, I shall sacrifice you for our sake. 」

「St...Stop...Ah...Uahhhhhhhhhhh!! 」

creak sound

I heard a dull sound from the video. When I looked closely at it, I saw that Serena's face got crushed! Her nose was disfigured in a horrifying way and her eyeballs popped out of her face.

「Wh...Whoa...! Weren't they companions...? 」

Monica began to laugh like a mad woman next to her sister's crushed face.

「Ahhhhhhhhhhh! I'm sorry my dear younger sister Serena! But, with this, I will take the Empress Ceremonic to a higher level! I know that you're seeing me through your earth snakes monitors! Now, you and I are finally connected by your mechanisms! This means that I'll be able to reach you on the lowest floor through this connection!」

Then, the hand of Ceremonic stretched towards the video where we were seeing from an earth snake camera.

「...Wha...What she said is really that possible? 」

The moment when John Dae looked right at me...

「Oh...Oh no...! 」

Kiriko shouted in a panicking way. Beyond Kiriko's sight was the hand of Ceremonic that stuck out of the water bucket!

Ceremonic forcibly tried to crawl out of that distorted space with a devilish expression on her face! It was a very terrible and horrifying scene as if the devil was coming to get us!

「Teleportation that moves through the space..."Dimension Step"...! 」

Kiriko and John Dae were petrified upon seeing this disturbing sight.

「It is a shame. But, the traps that you've set up for me won't work anymore. 」

Then, Ceremonic's hand grabbed my face before I could react.

「Now, you're going to die with a suffering of 100 times more, no, of 1000 times more than the suffering you've inflicted on me...!」

It was a desperate situation. However...On that precise moment, my face became sand and disappeared completely! Not only my face! All of my body transformed into sand and scattered on the floor!

「Wha...What...!? 」

Ceremonic was astonished. John Dae and Kiriko, who were supposed to be beside me, already turned into sand.

...In the meantime. John Dae, Kiriko and I were watching this scene from a video installed on the wall.

John Dae finally uttered some words beside me.

「He...Hey!! What the hell is that room!? 」

「It was a fake military room prepared by Seiya. He created some clay dolls exactly like us.」

「I...I fully understood that...But, Ceremonic killed her sister and gained the power to move between the earth snakes cameras on which we were watching!? How on earth was that earth snake camera connected to the fake room and not with this room!?!」

「Look at this. 」

I showed John Dae one of the pages of the scroll manual.

—

『Ceremonic may crawl out of the monitor like a ghost through the eyes of an earth snake. In preparation for that time, I blocked the connection by sandwiching another video point between the earth snake camera and the water bucket. By the way, the place where you are now isn't the lowest level of the underground labyrinth. The military room is located on an isolated place over a few meters away from the location of the underground labyrinth. All of the images that you saw from the water buckets belonged to the connection between the fake room and the underground labyrinth. Once the video has been corrupted, the image line disconnected from that sandwiching linkage.』

—

I spoke to John Dae, who was in a loss of words.

「This is the biggest trap of the underground labyrinth, the "Proxy Room"!」

Chapter 97: The Useless Goddess' Great Efforts (1)

「Ugh...! 」

Ceremonic knew that it was a trap. Therefore, she tried to get away from the monitor extremely fast. However, before she could retreat, the room itself enveloped in a dazzling flash.

...The previous explosions were little when compared to the huge firepower of the current explosion. The earth snake that was showing the scene was destroyed in the process. The video turned into a sandstorm.

A new earth snake appeared in the Proxy Room from the ground, and the video was projected once again...

「Gyahhh...Ahhhh... 」

Ceremonic was laying in the ground with continuous convulsions. In addition to having lost her left hand at the 10th level, she lost her right leg due to the current explosion.

Ceremonic's high-pitched breath resembled the sound of flying insects. But, then! The walls projected scorching flames directly towards Ceremonic! At the same time, the ceiling of the room made a loud noise and began to move in order to squeeze Ceremonic inside!

「Ju...Just how far did he go with his traps...!! 」

John Dae took a deep breath upon seeing the newly cruel traps.

—

『The Proxy Room is “the Last Fortress, one step before reaching you”. So, we must stop Ceremonic's invasion here and now.』

—

As I read Seiya's instructions, those unforgiving traps attacked Ceremonic immediately.

...When the ceiling that crushed Ceremonic returned to its original position, Ceremonic didn't move anymore.

「Did...Did it kill her? 」

「I'll check it out! 」

I couldn't see her status before. But, now that Ceremonic looked fairly weakened, it may work...

I activated my clairvoyance ability to see her abilities.

Empress Ceremonic

Level – 99 (MAX)

HP – 1 / 666666

MP – 1 / 66666

Attack – 666666

Defense – 666666

Agility – 666666

Magic – 6666

Potential – 999 (MAX)

Resistance – Fire, Water, Wind, Thunder, Ice, Earth, Darkness, Poison, Paralysis, Curse, Instant Death, Sleep, Abnormal Condition

Special skills – Evil God Protection (Lv MAX), Curse Wave (Lv MAX), Instant Movement Visibility (Lv MAX), Dark Physical Strength (Lv MAX) *can only be killed with Light Attributes attacks*

Skills – Grudge Hand, Stealth Step, Dimension Step, Bloody Sisteria

Personality – Relentless

「I...I can see it! Her HP has only 1 point! 」

「Yeah. But, that means that she still has some life force left...! 」

「Her status says that she can be defeated with "Light Attributes attacks"! That means that we can finish her off with a power of light!」

I asked Kiriko a question.

「Listen, Kiri. Is there a way to reach Ceremonic from here? 」

「Let's see...Ah, yes! Here is the item on the lower page of this scroll that says, "How to reach the Proxy Room by using the underground elevator"!」

After I took a long deep breath, I declared the following words after I made my own resolution.

「I will...finish her off! 」

Then, Kiriko showed me the scroll.

「Bu...But, look at his instructions! Mister Seiya says, "don't get close to the Proxy Room, except in a case of emergency".」

「Both her HP and MP are at 1 point! Ceremonic is almost dying! Besides, I've been watching her for a while now, and it seems that she doesn't have any weapon with the Chain Destruction! That means that she can't kill me permanently!」

「You...You have a point. She might use her instant movement skill again to teleport between the spaces in order to escape. So, it would be better to finish her off immediately...」

I gave the earth snake from my chest to Kiriko, who was worried about me.

「Here. I give you this earth snake mobile phone. I can talk with Kiri at all times. So, you don't have to worry too much, okay?」

「But...I'm worried. I'm anxious about that... 」

「It will be fine! I practiced with the Goddess of Gold for times like this! 」

John Dae put his hand on Kiriko's shoulder.

「Have faith, Kiriko. Let's believe in the goddess. 」

「Ye...Yes! 」

「Okay, I'm going now. 」

After reading the page "How to reach the Proxy Room by using the underground elevator", I went to the corner of our room. After I showed the page to the earth snake that appeared in front of me, it nodded positively as a response. It looked like I could go to the room where Ceremonic was staying.

After I waved goodbye to both John Dae and Kiriko, my body disappeared into the ground as if it were absorbed by moving sands.

I moved through the ground to the Proxy Room as if I were climbing the Cave Along. I noticed the presence of Ceremonic a bit further away from me. She was laying in the ground.

『Hey, goddess. Can you hear me? 』

Suddenly, I heard John Dae's voice from the earth snake mobile phone.

「Yes. I've arrived here. 」

『Miss Lista. Please, be careful. 』

「It's okay. I'll do it immediately. 」

After I took a deep breath...I stretched my hand towards Ceremonic and raised my voice simultaneously.

「Ei, ei!! Ei, ei, eiiii!! 」

I heard noisy voices from the other side of the phone.

『Huh!! What the hell is that goddess doing!! She's just saying "Ei, ei", isn't that right!? 』

『Mi...Miss Lista!? 』

Regardless of that, I kept chanting aloud...However, I didn't see any changes on Ceremonic's appearance.

『Hey, goddess!! Don't be silly!! You're not in a Summer Festival!! 』

I...I knew that!! Damned undead!! The power of light won't be activated if I didn't scream these ridiculous chants!! It couldn't be helped though!!

「Ei, ei, ei!! Ei, ei, eiiii, ei, ei, eiiii!! 」

I kept screaming as a maniac even though I felt utterly embarrassed about this. Eventually, John Dae's anger subsided and he just sighed deeply.

『Tha...That's a "Summer Festival Goddess" ...! I'm such a fool to have believed in her...!』

Who's the Summer Festival Goddess!! By the way, what's happening!? It doesn't work even though I'm doing my best!...Bardul!! That greedy goddess!! I'll teach her a lesson!!

I tried to put out my hand closer to Ceremonic in order to produce more effect.

All of a sudden, Ceremonic's arm, which didn't have meat and was just bones, grabbed my wrist!

「Gyaaaaa!! 」

「Ohh...Ohhhhh...! 」

A groaning voice came out of a horrid mouth without teeth!

『This...This is bad! Kiriko, we must go there now! 』

『Ye...Yes! 』

I was about to cry when my arm was grabbed by Ceremonic's arm.

Ahhhhh, why did this happen now of all places!? Why did I have to mess everything up!?

I regretted my decision. Nonetheless, I noticed some irregularity soon after.

「Ugh...Ah...! Ughhhhh...! 」

Ceremonic was groaning painfully!

「Wha...What? 」

Before long, I noticed that a faint light came out of my hand and spread throughout Ceremonic's body!

No...No way!! My power was really working on her!? Gre...Great!! If this was really true, then I'll scream with all my might!! Get out!! My goddess power!! C'mon...Plus Ultraaaaaaaa!! (EN: OHHHHH!)

「Ei, ei, ei, eiiii!! Eiiii, ei, ei, ei!! Eiiii, ei, ei, eiiii!! Ei, ei, ei, ei, ei, ei, ei, ei, ei... 」

I've never screamed so much in my life. I kept screaming "ei, ei" without stopping.

「Are you okay, Summer Festival Goddess!! 」

「Miss Lista!! 」

The two of them emerged from the ground extremely worried about me. However, they became so shocked upon seeing Ceremonic.

Ceremonic was completely wrapped in light as if she were a mummy. The arm that was holding my wrist fell to the ground without force.

「Did...Did you finish her off...? 」

「Maybe...I'll check it out... 」

I focused on her physical strength when I activated my clairvoyance ability to see her status.

Empress Ceremonic

Level – 99 (MAX)

HP – 0 / 666666

「Her HP is 0! She is finally dead! 」

I screamed with happiness. Then, I looked at John Dae and Kiriko, and noticed that both of them were silent.

Ugh! Were they amazed in a negative way? Well...It couldn't be helped though. Actually, my way of finishing her off was pretty lame...Ah, I wondered why I never got the chance to feel great and victorious. I wished I were cool, but I wasn't...

Nevertheless. Contrary to my own expectations, John Dae and Kiriko expressed utmost admiration.

「Your power of light was superb!! I take my words back, goddess!! 」

「...Eh? 」

「You...You're amazing, Miss Lista!! You won without Mister Seiya!! As expected of a great goddess like you!!」

「Yo...You think so? It was nothing special... 」

I responded with a humble face, but...

...Yahooooooooo!!

I screamed with my heart full of joy upon hearing those expressions of approval.

Chapter 97: The Useless Goddess' Great Efforts (2)

After Ceremonic was successfully defeated, I summoned the portal to the God's realm. When I arrived after John Dae, who was carrying Seiya with him, I noticed that two beautiful shining moons were on the sky. Apparently, it was night at the God's realm.

John Dae couldn't enter the holy temple because of the strong godliness aura. Therefore, we asked for Celseus to help us carry Seiya to my room and lay him down on my bed.

I gently touched Seiya's cheeks. I was worried about his health, but Celseus spoke in a happy tone as if it were amusing to him.

「Who knew that this hero would fall unconscious? *machiavelic laugh* This is what I call his divine punishment.」

「You'd be in a big trouble if Seiya heard what you just said, Celseus. 」

「Hmm...My bad. I won't say anything anymore. Absolutely nothing. I promise. So, please, don't tell him what I said. I beg you. I apologize.」

Then, Aria entered the room.

「Lista. Lady Isister wants to see you. I'll take care of Seiya, so don't worry and just go...」

—

I started wondering while I went to the Great Goddess Isister's room.

Why did she...Ahhh!? Don't tell me that she wanted to see me because I finished off Ceremonic!? That was beyond the scope of support as a goddess!?

I entered her room nervously. I really thought that I'd receive the punishment from the innermost gods of the God's realm once again. My eyes overflowed with tears.

「There's no punishment, Listarte. Even though Ryuguuin Seiya fell down, wasn't it due to his earth magic that made it possible to overthrow Ceremonic in the end? You followed his instructions and managed to defeat the enemy. You did enough to support him.」

Ah, I'm glad! ...Hmm? Then, what did she want to talk about?

Suddenly, the Great Goddess Isister bowed to me.

「Ehhh!? Great Goddess Isister!? 」

「It has been extremely difficult for me to predict the future because of the evil god's presence in Exfolia...」

Then, she showed a bitter expression on her face.

「I apologize. I was the one who gave Ryuguuin Seiya a mental exhaustion. No matter how strong he is, Ryuguuin Seiya is a human being after all... and... It seems that he didn't tell you about that.」

「Eh, sorry, but what do you mean with "about that"...? 」

After a moment of silence, the Great Goddess Isister spoke the following words.

「I'll tell you when the right time comes. 」

「Ye...Yes... 」

Then, she changed topics and smiled at me.

「Listarte. In the absence of your hero, you worked extremely hard as a goddess to provide great support for the salvation cause. There's no problem about Ryuguuin Seiya's health. He is safe and shall awake soon enough.」

—

After the conversation with the Great Goddess Isister, I returned to my room where Seiya was sleeping with a cold towel on his forehead. I opened the door, but I didn't see Aria or Celseus.

...What! Don't tell me that, maybe...!

「Se...Seiya...! You finally woke up...! 」

Seiya already got up from my bed. He was looking outside from the window.

「Aren't you tired? You can sleep a bit more if you want... 」

However, he remained silent. I mean, Seiya. I bet that he regretted falling down during a crucial battle.

「It...It's all right! We managed to defeat Ceremonie! That's all that matters! Eh...You don't believe it? It's true because we returned to the God's realm without any problems! That's my proof! Besides, Kiri and John Dae are safe as well! So, there's nothing to worry about!」

Still, Seiya had a stern look on his face and just looked at the window.

「Listen, Seiya...What did you hear from the Great Goddess Isister? You didn't tell me anything about it...」

Further silence. I finally raised my voice.

「Yo...You know what!! Yo...You don't have to do everything on your own, got it!? We...no!! Why don't you rely more on me!? I...I'm here to give you the support you need!!」

My feelings were unbearable, and I couldn't suppress myself any longer. I approached Seiya and embraced him from behind. I put my head on his back and held him tightly, even though I didn't feel much body temperature.

「You must think that many people died because of you...It's hard, right? Does it hurt badly? You can't think properly because of that, right? But, you know...Seiya, you're not alone. Because, I am by your side...!」

I wanted to melt Seiya's icy heart...While I thought so; I hugged Seiya with a stronger embrace. On this very moment...

cracking sound

Seiya's body collapsed entirely on my arms! It transformed into sand and scattered on the floor! I screamed crazily!

「Gyaaaaa!! I wanted to melt his heart, but I melted all of his body instead!?!」

No...No!! There was no way that that happened for real!! This was...a clay doll!! But, wait a second!! Wasn't I having a great private time with Seiya!? And yet, I was talking emotively with a clay doll!?

Then, I turned around abruptly. The real Seiya was staring at me with white boring eyes.

Somehow, I managed to say a few words thereafter.

「Wha...wha...what is a clay doll doing in my room...? 」

「I didn't want you to attack me when I was in my weak state. 」

「I...I wouldn't do that to you...More importantly, you know...did you see everything that happened just now?」

「Yeah. I've been watching the whole thing. 」

Oh nooooooooo!! How embarrassinggggggg!!

I wanted to die because I was too embarrassed about it. I held my face with both of my hands and I fell on my bed. Seiya spoke the following words.

「When I look at you, I feel that everything about this world is damn lame and ridiculous.」

「What the hell do you mean!! 」

I shouted extremely high. Yet, Seiya went to the door as if he didn't hear me.

「Where are you going now? 」

「I'm going to the summoning chamber. 」

「Are you going on your own? 」

「I've recovered. But, just to make sure that I'm feeling relatively well, I'll be taking a good night's rest today before heading to Exfolia.」

「I understand. 」

Nevertheless, Seiya stopped before opening the door and said...

「Lista. You were helpful this time. 」

「...Eh? 」

And then, he went away and closed the door.

—

After Seiya left, I was rolling in bed with great excitement. "Lista. You were helpful this time."; "Lista. You were helpful this time." ...I grinned happily while I recalled Seiya's words for countless of times.

Suddenly, I remembered Queen Carmilla's words after we defeated the Grand Lion.

『It's okay to stay next to him. This world is too harsh for a lone wolf. He needs someone by his side. You're a fool and a clumsy person, but that's all right. That is your own way of unknowingly saving that child.』

...I was a little confused and wasn't entirely convinced about that...But, I was glad of how things turned out in the end!!

I felt that my existence as a goddess was somehow recognized. Therefore, I was extremely happy about it that I wanted to rejoice aloud.

—

...This night. I had a dream about Seiya. Maybe it was because I felt the warmth in my bed after Seiya slept in it.

In that dream, I was Princess Tiana before I reincarnated as a goddess. Next to me stood Seiya. In addition, I had a very cute baby in my arms. The unfriendly Seiya looked at the baby and me affectionately and smiled gently.

I wondered if it were a lucid dream. It was odd, because I perfectly knew that I was dreaming in my own dream.

...About this very dream. After Seiya defeated the Demon King from his previous saving quest, he didn't return to his original world and remained in Exfolia. The baby was born and, Seiya and I lived happily together in Tarmine...

If fate could be changed, I wondered if such future would have been possible. My chest hurt painfully when I thought deeply about it.

I tried to appease my chest pain. Therefore, I gently touched the baby's face that I was carrying in my arms.

However...I froze from the moment I saw this baby's face.

Long hair! Crushed nose and no eyes! Before I knew it, the baby's face transformed into a bloodied face of a horrid woman!

I tried to escape, but the baby stuck firmly to my chest and didn't leave! This thing slowly opened its mouth with missing teeth!

「I am...Shanak. I am Ceremonic's younger sister, Shanak. 」

Then, the bloodied face approached my eyes!

「The curse will continue until your soul goes to heaven. The last curse of the Empress Ceremonic ends with the life of a god..."Bloody Sisteria".」

Chapter 98: The Hateful Bloodied Sister

「Whoaaaaaaa!! 」

I jumped out of my bed as soon as I opened my eyes. My body was extremely sweaty.

...Ho...Horrifying!! I had a truly horrible dream!!

From my window I watched the gentle sunshine of the morning sun of the God's realm, and somehow, I managed to adjust my breathing.

Ah...I changed my mood. I wanted to go to the Cafe De Celseus to have a nice cup of coffee...

While I changed to my usual dress, I heard 「Bang! Bang! Bang! 」 . Someone knocked on my door violently.

「So noisy, who is it...uh, ehheheh!? 」

I was surprised when I opened the door. I saw Aria, Adenela, Celseus, and also, the Goddess of Fire, Hestica, and the God of Thunder, Orlando. There were many gods gathered at my door.

「Wha...What's the matter!? 」

When I shouted, Orlando spoke in a bewildering way.

「That's what I should be saying! Listarte! I felt a tremendous evil coming from your room just now!」

「Evil...? 」

Aria put her hand on her mouth. Then, she pointed her finger towards me as if she saw something terrible.

「Li...Lista...! A strong evil aura is overflowing from your body...! 」

「What an ominous aura! 」

I didn't understand the meaning of this. Contrary to the gods that were far from me, Adenela was the only one who approached me. She held my hand and stared fixedly at me.

「It...It's a cu...curse. Did...did the caster tou...touched your hand? 」

Adenela pushed my hand up and showed me my wrist. There was a mark attached to my skin that clearly showed that someone grabbed my wrist before.

「It...It can't be...!! 」

Then, what I saw earlier wasn't a dream!?

「Eh, the last curse of Empress Ceremonia is "Bloody Sisteria"....! 」

I repeated aloud the lines that I've heard on my dream. Somehow, Aria softened her expression and smiled at me.

「Lista. Don't worry. This is the God's realm. There must be a way to solve this. 」

Celseus also nodded positively even though he stepped further away from me.

「Be...Besides, a goddess like you won't die just because you were cursed! So, you don't have anything worry about, am I right?」

「Ye...Yes...You're right! 」

「Anyway, let's talk with Lady Isister. 」

After I left my room with Aria, I noticed that Seiya was leaning against the wall of the temple's corridor.

「Ah, Seiya! Wait for me here! It won't take that long! 」

「...There's no way that getting rid of a curse will be that quick. 」

Seiya spitted a small sigh and gradually approached me.

「I'm going with you. 」

Seiya, Aria and I headed towards the Great Goddess Isister's room.

—

「Excuse us... 」

Followed by Aria; Seiya and I entered the room immediately. The Great Goddess Isister was sitting on a chair with a trouble expression on her face. She spoke before I could open my own mouth.

「Listarte's body is covered with a black mist. It's been a long while since I've seen such a strong curse as yours. Most probably, the caster exchanged her life in order to activate that curse.」

The Great Goddess Isister continued to explain.

「In the bodies of gods and heroes are the temporary souls, the "Astral Soul". The Chain Destruction is a magical device that destroys the original soul, the "Divine Soul", by destroying the chain that links the lifecycle core.」

Out of nowhere, the Great Goddess Isister began to talk about the Chain Destruction. I felt anxious about this particular change of topic.

「Do...Don't tell me that...Great Goddess Isister...! 」

「That's right. That curse has the same effect as the Chain Destruction. Your Divine Soul will be completely destroyed once that curse gets activated.」

「Do...Do you mean that I'm about to die!? 」

I felt dizzy upon realizing the harsh truth. Seiya asked the following question after Aria and I remained silent.

「Is there a way to stop the curse? 」

「I can't read Listarte's future because of the evil god. So, what you hear from now on is not my foreknowledge, but my guess. In order to stop the curse, you have to release it with an overwhelming power of light that surpasses this terrible curse. Or let the curse itself sense that the Divine Soul perished and went to heaven.」

Ugh! But, the phrase "the Divine Soul perished and went to heaven" meant that I had to die!

「Old hag. Isn't this curse due to the power of the evil god? If we manage to defeat the evil god that protected Ceremonic, the curse would weaken, wouldn't it?」

「The curse doesn't come from the protection of the evil god, but from Ceremonic herself. And now, Ceremonic has perished but her curse remains. The curse won't disappear even if the power of the evil god gets subsided.」

「I see. So, how much time does she have before her soul gets destroyed?」

The Great Goddess Isister gazed at my face, and then, she said the following words.

「From the amount of evil energy that covers Listarte...I'd say that the curse will be activated overnight, or probably a bit sooner than that.」

In...In one night!?

Seiya looked back at me.

「Lista. Summon the portal. 」

「Eh? 」

「First, let's go back to Exfolia to check Ceremonic's corpse. There may be a clue that'll show us how to break the curse.」

「Ye...Yeah... 」

I didn't want to see Ceremonic's body, but of course, I didn't dare to say something like that during this perilous situation.

「Seiya. Lista. Be careful... 」

After I waved goodbye to both Aria and the Great Goddess Isister, I opened the portal that led us to the underground Proxy Room.

—

...After the last traps were triggered, the Proxy Room became a huge mess. The walls were partially destroyed and everything was in a terrible condition.

And then, I noticed that Ceremonic was lying in the ground with the same state as we left her.

「Huh? Seiya? 」

Suddenly, I noticed that Seiya disappeared from my side. Seiya was peeking at the room with one eye from the portal's door.

「...What are you doing? 」

「Is Ceremonic really dead? Isn't the effect of the curse continuing even after she died? I won't be able to help you if I get cursed as well.」

「She...She's already dead. I was cursed because Ceremonic grabbed my wrist. Seiya, you'll be fine.」

Correct. Specific conditions were necessary for the activation of a powerful curse. She held my wrist for a long time before I finished her off. Therefore, I met those conditions.

Finally, Seiya slowly came out of the portal. He narrowed his eyes while he stared at Ceremonic.

「She's dry like a mummy. Lista. Was that your power? 」

「Ye...Yes. She became like this when she got exposed to my power of light. 」

「In other words, you were cursed because you entered the Proxy Room and you tried to kill Ceremonic afterwards.」

「Hmm...I'm sorry... 」

Seiya didn't look at me with icy eyes, even though I broke the rules of his instructions.

「Well, this is also my fault. 」

After he professed those words, Seiya began to slice Ceremonie with the sheath of his sword.

「Wha...What are you doing? 」

「I'm doing an autopsy. 」

...After that. Seiya sliced Ceremonie's corpse without stopping. Before long, he rolled every piece with the sheath of his sword, and then, he stared at me.

「I confirm her absolute death. Now the possibility that Ceremonie remained alive and could invoke another curse has finally been eliminated.」

「So...So, that was your real purpose... 」

「Okay. Let's meet the god that taught you that light attribute skill. 」

We gained nothing special in the Proxy Room except for merely confirming Ceremonie's death. As usual, after sinking Ceremonie's corpse to the core of this planet with the power of Seiya's earth magic, we finally returned to the God's realm.

—

I directed the portal right in front of the mansion with tiled roof hidden in the Heavenly Green Forest. I opened the front door made of wood, and entered the mansion of Bardul, the Goddess of Gold.

Bardul was in the tatami room. She spotted my presence and smiled at me.

「Oh my, oh my. I can see that your practice with me was a success...Whatttttttt!!」

However, Bardul screamed when I approached her.

「Wha...What a frightening evil aura!! That's a terrible curse!! Please go home as soon as possible!!」

Bardul brought a pot from the altar and tossed some salt at us!

「*cough cough* Wa...Wait a moment, Bardul!! I just want to talk with you... 」

「No matter how much money you offer me, it will be impossible for me to get rid of that powerful curse!! Just go back now!!」

Seeing how Baldur threw salt at us with great vigor, Seiya wrinkled his eyebrows.

「Hey. Who's that? Is she the "Old Hag Goddess of Golden Sand"?」

「No...No, we don't have a goddess here with that title! She should be a goddess with a light attribute, but...」

Seiya approached Bardul and grabbed the pot from her hands. Then, he moved the pot upward and put it on Bardul's head!

「Ah!? It...It's dark!? And...There's salt on my eyes!! 」

Seiya began to walk away as if nothing had happened at all.

「This is a waste of time. Let's go. 」

「Ye...Yes... 」

—

This time, Seiya told me to open the portal to the temple's rooftop of the God's realm. It seemed that his solution no.2 was to ask Valkyrie, the Goddess of Destruction, for help. Valkyrie was the one that told Seiya about the existence of Zeth, the other Goddess of War. Perhaps she knew a solution that even the Great Goddess Isister didn't know of.

The half-naked goddess, who had chains around her body, drew an ugly picture on the rooftop today. As soon as she saw Seiya coming on her direction, she immediately put her paintbrush down.

「I understand Listarte condition. It can't be helped though. I will take it off using my own skin. 」

Then, she put her hand on my face.

「Eh? Lady Valkyrie? 」

「It's quite simple. The objective is to trick the curse into believing that "you're dead" for real.」

「Wa...Wait a second, Lady Valkyrie!! Do...Do you really mean that!? 」

「Destruction Operation Method the First..."Shattered Break"! 」

「Aghhh!! 」

I felt an overwhelming pain before my eyes blacked out.

—

...I regained my consciousness after a while. But, I didn't know for sure if my consciousness was actually lucid. I saw myself falling down further away. Next to me, stood Seiya and Valkyrie. Then, my head was destroyed. It got crushed so grotesquely that it looked like a scene from a horror movie that children were forbidden to watch.

...Gyaaaaa!! I was killed by Valkyrie!? Did that mean that I was a ghost now!? Don't joke with me, c'mon!! This was ridiculous!! But, well, if this was the only option to help me get rid of the curse, then it couldn't be helped...

As I stared at my own fallen body, the evil aura got out from it and gradually transformed into a person's shape! It shaped into a double-headed monster with female heads!

...Hiiiiii!? Ceremonic!!

Because of the evil aura, Ceremonic's lost leg and arm regained their original shape. However, Serena and Monica's faces were full of blood.

On this precise moment! Black blood spilled from between those two heads! The skin ripped apart and a third head appeared! The new face was full of blood as well, but was hollow! I didn't see any eyeballs on that creepy face!

For some reason, neither Seiya nor Valkyrie were aware of my ghostly existence nor the shaped form of Ceremonic. Perhaps, Ceremonic and I were different beings like ghosts or spirited bodies, or even beings that only appeared on the unconscious mind.

Ceremonic approached my fallen body; she bent her knee and muttered the following chanting words.

「Dead? Dead? Dead? Dead? Dead? Dead? 」

However, she stood up unexpectedly.

She twisted her neck abruptly and walked towards the ghostly me, who was watching the whole scene from afar! She was supposed to be blind! Then, why!

...Ahhhhh!

I tried to escape, but my body didn't move! She grabbed my body and pushed it close to her bloody face! Then, she spoke with an eerie voice that sounded as if it came directly from the bottom of hell!

「You are not dead. You are not dead. You are not dead. You are not dead. You are not dead. You are not dead.」

—

「Gyaaaaaaaa!! 」

I woke up screaming like a crazy woman.

「Are...Are you okay, Lista!? 」

Aria looked at me with a worried face.

「Ah, what? Me? 」

I looked around and saw that I were in my own room. Not to mention that, beside Aria, were Seiya, Celseus, Adenela and even Valkyrie was here. There were also other gods too. I tried to touch my face that was fully destroyed by Valkyrie, but it seemed that everything was intact.

「Listen, Aria. For how long have I been sleeping? 」

「For about two hours. Actually, while you were sleeping, we tried everything we could think of a solution to your problem. But...」

Then, I noticed that the Great Goddess Isister was in my room as well. It was very rare to see her out of her room. When I saw the Great Goddess Isister's sad complexion...

"Ah, I see. I am beyond the point of saving"...I thought deeply about it.

I held Aria's hand.

「Aria. I entrust you with my saving quest after I die. Please save Exfolia with Seiya and everybody else.」

「Uhhhh, Lista...! That...That's...! 」

Aria began to cry. I stroked Aria's head gently, and then, I spoke to Celseus.

「Listen, Celseus. Where are Kiri and John Dae? 」

「They are at my cafe. The both of them are worried about you. 」

「Please, tell them "I'm sorry". 」

「I...I understand...Ugh...Oh no...This gloomy atmosphere...I can't stand this anymore.」

Celseus covered his face with his hand and jumped out of my room. I looked at Seiya who stood beside me.

「Seiya. I was happy when you told me that I was "helpful this time". I did many inexcusable things since we began the Exfolia saving quest. But I truly wanted to help you even if it was just a little. That's why I have no regrets. I'm happy. But, you know...」

I took my last bit of courage to tell the silent Seiya the one and only desire of my heart.

「Finally, I have only one request left... 」

Everyone was watching me. Because these were my "last" moments, I didn't feel that embarrassed or ashamed.

「You know...a Kiss...Could you grant me this request? I'm fine with a kiss on my cheek...」

I was shy, so I laughed timidly.

「Well, this isn't about like or dislike, nor humans nor goddesses. But, just a simple kiss. You see...Haven't you been on an adventure with me all this time? Therefore, I think I deserve a farewell kiss.」

「Lista... 」

Seiya approached me with a serious complexion.

...Ah, how sad. I won't be able to remember this precious moment after I die.

And then...

bang

Seiya hit my head with his fist!

「...Papi!! 」

A strange voice burst out of my mouth because of the strong shock! The surrounding gods began to murmur about me.

「Ah, is that what they call a human kiss!? 」

「It looked like a fist from hell to me, wasn't it!? 」

「I...I wonder if the human kiss is actually a smack with a fist!? 」

I yelled at the gods who began to say rubbish things.

「There's no way that this was a kiss!! It was definitely a fist!! 」

Somehow, I managed to convince the gods as they said, 「Ah, I knew it wasn't a kiss! 」 . Then, I stared furiously at Seiya and began to shout out loud.

「Hey!! What the hell did you do, damn you!! 」

Then, Seiya sighed at me.

「You're energetic as always. 」

「How can you be like that with me until the very end!! 」

「Nobody said that this would be the end for you. Are you giving up now? Don't you have any regrets?」

「Eh... 」

And then, Seiya stared fixedly at me with serious-looking eyes.

「Don't give up that easily. Keep fighting until the very last moment. I decided that I won't have any more regrets. I did it for me, so, do it for you as well.」

「Seiya...? 」

「There's still some time left until the curse is fully activated. The possibility of your survival hasn't disappeared completely. Follow me.」

「Eh, EHHHHH!? 」

He took me out of my bed by force. And so...

「Old hag. You too. 」

「Ah, yes, yes. 」

Seiya grabbed my arm and the Great Goddess Isister's arm and ventured out of the room after pushing the gods aside.

Chapter 99: The Gods and the People (1)

「Hey, Seiya! Where are you going? 」

Seiya kept walking silently, as he pulled the Great Goddess Isister and me without stopping. The Great Goddess Isister finally opened her mouth when we arrived at the third floor of the heavenly temple.

「...Ryuguuin Seiya. Are you planning to involve the innermost gods? 」

「That's right. I want you to show me the power of the Goddess of Time. This may involve some danger, but it's the only way.」

Ah...!! By any chance, Seiya...Was he trying to save me from the curse by using the power of Chronoa, the Goddess of Time!? Bu...But!

「Modifications of time and space are a taboo in the discipline of gods. That solution might be impossible to accomplish...」

Seiya continued to walk regardless of what the Great Goddess Isister explained to him.

「Old hag. It'd be enough for me if you let me just meet the Goddess of Time. 」

—

Seiya stopped in front of a door in the corridor of the third floor from the heavenly temple. This place was the "room that stops time" that led to the almighty world of the innermost gods. Even if he heard it from Aria before, this was the first time that Seiya entered this room. Seiya convinced the Great Goddess Isister to cast a spell to open the door. Then, we ventured inside.

After we passed through the shelves displaying the souls of gods, a large painting appeared at the end. The mysterious painting showed a winding road that connected a temple to a cliff. This painting was the holy entrance to the almighty world of the innermost gods.

We stood in front of the picture. At this point, the Great Goddess Isister looked back at Seiya with a serious expression on her face.

「Ryuguuin Seiya. Please be careful. Once upon a time, a god asked for a wish to the innermost gods. Nevertheless, he betrayed the rules that bound that wish. Consequently, those events triggered the Unification War of the God's Realm.」

...The Unification War of the God's Realm...

I recalled that Zeth, the other Goddess of War, talked about that. I was born a hundred years ago in the God's realm as a goddess. Most probably, those events happened before I was even born. But, "war"...I couldn't believe that such a violent thing happened in the peaceful God's realm.

The Great Goddess Isister continued to speak with Seiya.

「Anyway. Please, don't spoil the mood of the innermost gods of the almighty world. 」

「It'll be okay. I'll keep that in mind. 」

After entering the painting, we walked on the winding road. When we arrived at the stone steps in front of the temple, the Great Goddess Isister stopped walking and knelt down. I imitated her gesture and knelt down as well.

「Our Ladyship Chronoa, the Goddess of Time, reigning through the ages of the almighty world of the innermost gods...I am Isister, the high-ranking deity in charge of the God's realm. I, thereby, stand by your presence to request an audience with you...」

Then, the door of the temple slowly opened.

...I only heard a voice when I came here to reduce the consequences of my punishment. However, this time, Chronoa, the Goddess of Time, appeared from the door engulfed with a striking dazzling light.

「Oh...Oh gosh...So beautiful...! 」

I forgot my frightening situation the moment I saw her appearance.

Usually, the gods from the God's realm had their wings sealed. But, she, the Goddess of Time, appeared with her large and beautiful wings on her back. It was inspiring to look at such a huge divine aura. The high goddess Chronoa was dressed in a stunning glittering dress. Her long hair was tied up beautifully behind her back. She was more noble and beautiful than any other goddesses I've seen so far.

「I shall present myself to all of you after Isister requested an audience with me. 」

Her Eminence Lady Chronoa approached us with a smile. Then, she looked at me and showed me a compassionate complexion.

「Listarte...How sad. You have a terrible curse casted upon you. I'd like to turn back time with my power to your original state before the caster could curse you...」

When she spoke those words...

「...I forbid you. 」

I heard a low voice that surrounded us. Chronoa shrugged her shoulders.

「You sure are noisy. 」

「...It is against my rules, as the God of Reason, to let you turn back time.」

This dignified voice sounded familiar. It was Nemesil, the God of Reason. He was the one who was reluctant to restore my healing powers back. For me, he had the image of a "strict and stubborn high god". Yet, I knew that Chronoa wouldn't be able to use her powers without first getting the permission of this god.

While everyone remained silent, Seiya spoke directly to Chronoa.

「Don't worry. Just ignore him. 」

Oh no, Seiya really spoke in a bluntly way here!!

It seemed that Nemesil heard Seiya's voice. He spoke with anger then.

「Human! Watch your tongue! I am Nemesil, the God of Reason! 」

The door of the temple opened violently! And, when this god came out of there...

「Bi...Big...! 」

He looked like a giant god, because he were at least five meters tall. He had a dignified face, a long mustache and a sculpted body. He was a thousand times more divine and intimidating than Celseus.

Nemesil, the God of Reason, walked right in front of Seiya with strong and fearsome steps!

「Who...Whoa!! Seiya!! Shouldn't you apologize!? 」

However, Seiya didn't apologize. Then, a strong voice roared from above Seiya's head, who just stared at Nemesil with bored eyes.

「I make the rational decisions of the almighty world! The alteration of time and space is absolutely forbidden! I won't allow you to turn back time for Listarte!」

I trembled my body so much because of this tremendous force. Even the Great Goddess Isister was stiff in his presence. Still, Seiya didn't change his expression.

「I didn't say we should turn back time before the curse was casted on her. The battle against the Demon King Artemaeus from one year ago...Lista and I just need to watch it unfold right in front of our eyes.」

Ehh!! Go back one year ago and watch the battle with the Demon King!? What did it have to do with breaking my curse!?

I couldn't understand Seiya's intentions with this suggestion. But, the Great Goddess Isister seemed to understand him by bedding the knee.

「I see. Ryuguuin Seiya. You may be able to save Listarte from the curse without causing an alteration of time and space.」

「Wha...What do you mean? 」

I asked the Great Goddess Isister what she meant by that, but...

「You don't need to know the details. 」

This wasn't the first time that they spoke about something that I mustn't know. But, why! This was about me after all!

Nemesil said the following words to Seiya.

「If that's the case, then just ask Isister to have a look at the past by using her crystal ball.」

「No. That's useless. We need to go back to the past and see those events for ourselves from a close range.」

「If you return to the past and the Demon King, a monster, or a third party recognizes your appearance, there is a large possibility that a Time Paradox could occur. If that happens, Exfolia will definitely collapse.」

「To avoid that outcome, I could transform us into monsters with the power of the art of change. As a last resort, I could make us dive underground by using Cave Along.」

「...There's no need to go that far. 」

After Chronoa heard the conversation between the two of them, she offered Seiya and me a piece of cloth that resembled a cloak.

「Invisible Cape. This sacred tool prevents the conception of Time Paradox when traveling through the space of time. If one wears this cloak, it will make invisible the people who should not exist on that era. The smell, the movements, and even the sounds will disappear completely once you wear this sacred tool.」

Our existence could be concealed with this tool! Chronoa was extremely kind after all!

「There won't be any problem if you only watch the battle with the Demon King. Okay then, I shall send Listarte and Ryuguuin Seiya a year ago to Exfolia.」

Chronoa reached out to Seiya and me.

However, on this instant.

「Wait. I haven't given you my permission yet. 」

Nemesil's giant body stood in front of us. Seiya spoke as if he despised Nemesil.

「The Goddess of Time said it won't be a problem. Move away. Lista doesn't have much time left.」

「I told you to watch your tongue, boy!! 」

That angry voice was so loud that it even shook the foundation of the almighty world of the innermost gods!

「Don't you dare mess with me...!! I can crush you at any moment!! 」

When I saw Seiya's stance towards Nemesis's threats, my spine froze completely!

...Because, Seiya pulled the sword out of his sheath!

「Ryuguuin Seiya!! You mustn't!! 」

The Great Goddess Isister yelled aloud before I even opened my mouth.

However...Seiya didn't move even though he held his sword in an offensive stance.

「...What's this? 」

Nemesis screamed. And then, I noticed what was going on.

A reddish black aura got out of Seiya's sword and covered Nemesis's body! Nemesis noticed an abrupt change on his arm because wrinkles spread on his skin! He freaked out!

「My...My body is...? What is that sword...? 」

...It...It can't be! Don't tell me that sword is...! That sword was the Holy Power Drain Sword that absorbed the holy spirit of a god by growing old and becoming weak...!

Seiya spoke to Nemesis.

「It's the Lista Granny Sword. 」

「Don't tell them that name!! 」

Seiya continued to speak to Nemesis regardless of my screams.

「Nemesis, the God of Reason. Accept this request if you don't want to be an old gramps.」

「...You!! 」

Nemesis stared at Seiya with demonic eyes...But, I noticed that Seiya's presence in front of Nemesis had disappeared completely! Seiya took a considerable distance from Nemesis while holding the sword that emitted the dark ominous aura!

「Don't joke with me, mere human!! That "Lista Granny Sword"...I'll destroy it!! 」

Sorry, but...I knew that it was a tough situation, but please Lord Nemesil, don't say that sword's name! It was too embarrassing for me!

Nemesil bent against Seiya and took an offensive posture! While Seiya kept aiming at Nemesil with his sword! Nemesil didn't care about that sword's effect and rushed towards Seiya! And on the next moment! I doubted my own eyes upon watching the sight that happened right in front of me!

shrinking sound

As he approached Seiya, Nemesil's body became smaller and smaller as if, the biological evolution of monkey to human was caught in a reversal momentum!

「Eh...EHHHHHH!?!」

When he arrived right in front of Seiya...Nemesil transformed into a small but old man.

Of course, I was speechless. Actually, both the Great Goddess Isister and Her Eminence Lady Chronoa were with a loss of words as well. Meanwhile, Seiya asked Nemesil, who became small and old like an old grandpa.

「Lista and I are going to the past now...You don't mind, do you?」

Then, Nemesil smiled with a quivering mouth.

「Yeah. I don't mind it.」

「His personality got soft because he became a grandpa!? Milord Nemesil!! What about the Time Paradox thing!? Is it all right!?!」

「Time... Huh? What was it? I don't remember it. My lower back hurts.」

Nemesil sat down on the ground. We were shocked. Next to him stood Seiya, who just gazed attentively at his darkish sword.

「Yeah. This is a great sword. It was useful after all.」

After a moment of silence...

「Ahah...!」

Her Eminence Lady Chronoa began to laugh, as she couldn't endure it any longer. Furthermore...

「Ahahahahah!!」

Synchronizing with Chronoa's laugh was a neutral voice that came out of the temple's door!

...Thi...This voice was...The Supreme God Brahma!!

The no.1 god of the almighty world of the innermost gods, the God of Creation, didn't show his appearance as expected. But, I could hear his joyful voice coming from the corner of the temple's door.

「It's been a long time since I've had a good laugh. Nemesil, the God of Reason, as given you his permission. Both of you can go back to the past to see the battle against the Demon King.」

Gre...Great! The Supreme God gave us his OK!

「However, Ryuguuin Seiya. Let me tell you one thing. If the curse were reversed between you and Listarte, meaning that if it were you who were cursed instead, things would be different. We would never had agreed with this. But, Listarte is a goddess. Every god that lives in the God's realm is my child.」

In other words, these almighty gods would've "abandoned a human being even if he or she were the ones getting this predicament instead". I thought deeply about it, and I thought that his words were cold. Yet, Seiya responded to His Lordship Brahma's words with "yeah". He didn't say anything more. Then, Seiya approached Chronoa and whispered on her ear.

「...Understood. So, that timing, I see. Well then, I'll send you to the Demon King's Castle in Exfolia from one year ago.」

I wore the Invisible Cape with Seiya.

「Listen, Listarte. It won't take too long. After enough time, both of you will be forced to return to the almighty world of the innermost gods.」

「I...I understand! 」

「Ryuguuin Seiya. Please, take care of Listarte. 」

The Great Goddess Isister spoke directly to Seiya. He nodded positively in response. Her Eminence Lady Chronoa approached us and stretched one hand towards Seiya and me.

「Are you ready? Here I go... 」

The space around us became gradually distorted. Chronoa and the Great Goddess Isister's appearances slowly faded away from my field of vision...

Chapter 99: The Gods and the People (2)

Before I knew it, Seiya and I were in a dark space. The whole area had an evil atmosphere and reeked of blood.

...Wa...Was this place the Demon King's Castle...? Ugh...What a nauseating feeling...!

Suddenly, Seiya pulled my arm. He hid us behind the stone pillars that stood beside us. Although our voices, appearances, and movements were concealed and couldn't be felt by a third party, Seiya was still a cautious hero. Therefore, he hid us behind the stone pillars as a precaution.

I took a small peek at the scene from behind the stone pillars. At a considerable distance from us, I saw that the Demon King Artemaeus of Exfolia had already transformed into his final form. He had a horrendous and monstrous figure with four arms raised to the sky.

「This power...What a fearsome devilish power! So, this is the power of the evil god! With this, I can finally change Exfolia into a demon world!」

He must've killed the hero and received the blessing of the evil god. The Demon King Artemaeus laughed wickedly, and then, he left this chamber. After observing the surroundings for a while, Seiya approached the place where the Demon King laughed victoriously. I followed Seiya closely behind without making a noise.

Unexpectedly, Seiya signaled me to stop my movement. It seemed that something fell a bit further away from us.

...Do...Don't tell me...that was...!!

Seiya approached it alone. Then, he came back after a while.

「It seems the reckless idiot just died over there. 」

「Do...Do you mean that... 」

「Yeah. My old self. My head was crushed and my heart was gouged out. 」

Even after seeing his own corpse, Seiya spoke calmly as if he were talking about someone else.

「More importantly, Lista. How do you feel? Is there any change in your body? 」

「Cha...Change, you say...Hmm...I feel like throwing up...! 」

「That's not what I was referring to, but. Hmm...It's strange. According to what I've heard from Aria's story, the Demon King killed Princess Tiana and then he killed me immediately after eating the child from her belly...」

Seiya nodded positively as if he figured out what was going on.

「Which means...I see. So, she's still alive. 」

「Eh? 」

On this moment. My heart almost froze when I heard a painful thin voice coming from the other side of the dark chamber.

「Ri...Right now, whose voice is that!? Is someone else in here!? 」

「Over there. 」

I followed Seiya's slowly steps. I took a long and deep breath.

「Seiya...Where... Where are you? 」

A bloody Princess Tiana stood right in front of me! A large amount of blood was coming from her abdomen and she bled from her eyes and mouth!

...Im...Impossible...!! Her abdomen was ripped apart and the baby was eaten...And yet I...Princess Tiana was still alive...!?

「It's dark...It hurts...I'm scared... 」

How sad. Her eyes were no longer clear. She was losing consciousness. Even so, she battled against the fear of death, and crawled in the cold floor of this dark space.

「Seiya...It hurts...This is so painful...Seiya... 」

...Ugh!

I couldn't watch it anymore, so I turned my eyes away from Princess Tiana. And, when I turned around for a slight moment, I became utterly surprised.

It was because Seiya took off the cloak that Chronoa offered us.

「Se...Seiya!? Princess Tiana will see you!! There's going to be a Time Paradox...!! 」

「This woman's death is certain. She won't tell anyone that she saw me because she is about to die. The paradox won't happen.」

And then, Seiya approached Princess Tiana.

「...Tiana. I'm here. 」

Princess Tiana, who heard Seiya's voice, relaxed her painful expression a little.

「Seiya...? Seiya, is that you? 」

「Yes, I am. 」

「Seiya...I'm relieved... 」

Seiya silently took Princess Tiana's hand.

「Listen, I...I am going to die, right? 」

「That's correct. But, death is only a mere state where all of us will have to return to. A state that existed before we were born, and that it shall continue to exist after we perish. Don't be scared.」

「I see... 」

「I'm going to die eventually as well. Let's meet again then. 」

And then, Princess Tiana stopped moving.

...Before I knew it, tears fell from my eyes without stopping.

The cautious Seiya. He wanted to avoid actions that could cause a Time Paradox by any costs.

...But...Even so...He couldn't leave Princess Tiana to die alone with that much suffering...!

I was watching Seiya and Princess Tiana with tears in my eyes! At this point! An evil spirit spread away from my body!

Eh!! Thi...This is!?

The devilish aura that left my body gained a humanoid form! Then, the creepy Ceremonic with crushed eyes and nose approached Princess Tiana, who died on the cold floor of the Demon King's Castle!

「Ohhhhhh...The soul of the goddess went to the heavens! Dead! Dead! The goddess is dead! The curse was fulfilled, fulfilled, fulfilled...」

After Ceremonic murmured with satisfaction, she suddenly disappeared as if she melted into the darkness of the surrounding area.

...Seiya stood up and silently stared at me.

「The evil aura has disappeared. Apparently, this worked. 」

「Ceremonic's curse has been released...? But, how? 」

「Princess Tiana, who has the same soul as you Lista, was killed. Therefore, Ceremonie sensed this was the place when your soul went to heaven. As intended, Ceremonie fell for this illusionary trap and the curse lifted away.」

「So...So, that's what really happened, I see...! 」

「There was a possibility that the curse itself could have the power to hear our conversation in the almighty world of the innermost gods. The risk was high. That's why we didn't tell you the details.」

A few minutes later, I felt that Chronoa's magical powers were ending. It was almost time we returned back to the almighty world of the innermost gods. In the meantime, I spoke with Seiya.

「Seiya...Thank you. 」

「I don't need your thanks. I told you that it was my fault that you were cursed this time.」

「Wrong. That wasn't what I meant. Thank you...for taking care of Princess Tiana's last moments.」

「I just wanted to make sure that Ceremonie really thought that you were dead. Besides... 」

Seiya said the following words after looking at the corpse of Princess Tiana.

「On that state. Well, I don't know if my words reached her. Most probably not. 」

「...That's not true. 」

「How do you know that? 」

「Because...Because I...She...looked very happy in her last moments...! 」

I answered him while I cried my eyes out. After a brief silence, Seiya finally said the words.

「I see. You're right. 」

Eventually, the space around us became distorted. The time had probably come for us to leave this time space. We returned from the Demon King's Castle from one year ago to the almighty world of the innermost gods.

Chapter 100: A Determined Future

I was extremely grateful for Her Eminence Lady Chronoa and the Great Goddess Isister's help to lift my curse. After showing them my utmost gratitude, Seiya and I left the almighty world of the innermost gods. We opened the door of the "room that stops time" and walked through the corridor of the third floor. I noticed that the stars shined brightly from the windows.

「It's already late. So, let's go to Exfolia tomorrow. 」

「...Yes. 」

I had so many things to say. But, no words came of my mouth. Seiya went to the summoning chamber afterwards.

...I wanted to stay with Seiya for a bit longer...

I became alone again. I went to Aria's room to explain what happened and told her that I was finally safe. Then, I left the temple and headed to the Cafe De Celseus.

Celseus and everyone else were sitting on a table. John Dae and Kiriko saw me and rushed on my direction.

「Ohhh! Lista! 」

「Goddess! You're safe! 」

「Miss Lista! I'm glad! 」

「I'm sorry. I made you worry. I'm okay now. 」

Kiriko embraced me tightly. Then, John Dae asked the following question.

「By the way, where is that hero? 」

「He went back to the summoning chamber. We're heading to Exfolia tomorrow. 」

「But, it's better for Mister Seiya and Miss Lista to rest for longer period of time... 」

「Yeah. But, it's fine. Actually, we were supposed to leave the gods realm a long while ago. Yet, our departure got delayed because of me.」

Celseus brought me a cup of coffee and a slice of cake. After a short chat with them, I finally returned to my room in the heavenly temple.

I lay down on my bed and closed my eyes. My body was so heavy and my mind was so exhausted because of all the events that happened lately.

...Seiya was probably tired as well. He helped me even though he had a psychological relapse.

Seiya was an unreadable person. I never had a clue about his inner thoughts before. However, today I saw a different side of Seiya. He looked vulnerable like the rest of us. Actually, he didn't look that concerned or anxious, like always, and yet, I felt that his inner feelings were hurt. That's why...he fell down.

I didn't notice Seiya's mental fatigue until Kiriko told me about it. I felt such great embarrassment and was ashamed of myself, because I as Seiya's supportive goddess didn't understand my hero unlike Kiriko, the machine, who knew him better than me.

...I vowed to myself that, from now on, I'd be more concerned about Seiya's feelings and health...Spe...Speaking of which was it okay to leave Lord Nemesil as a grandpa? Well, who cares? Eventually, he'll return to his original appearance...

I fell asleep after I had those thoughts.

—

Before I knew it, I was alone in a dark space.

Ah, what? I was in my room not too long ago...Was this another dream?

When I looked around, I noticed that someone was standing still a little further away from me. It frightened me.

...No way, is that person Ceremonic!? But, the curse has been solved completely!!

When I looked closely at that person's silhouette, I saw that he was dressed with an eerie black robe that had the same hue as the darkness of this place. I felt that this mysterious person had a different appearance and aura as opposed to Ceremonic.

「Nice to meet you. Goddess Listarte. 」

That person talked to me. Actually, it was a woman with a husky voice. I couldn't see her face, because a big hood covered her entire head.

However...

「You managed to accomplish something great. You managed to escape from the consequences of Bloody Sisteria. I thought that no one wouldn't be able to save you. But, here you are. Well, it can't be helped if you saved yourself by travelling through time and space.」

My spine froze when I heard this woman's words. She knew about everything that happened to me.

「Wha...What...? Who...Who are you...? 」

「Ah, no need to worry. I can't kill a god neither the hero. I'm just a powerless existence whose ability can distort the ways of the world. But, I believe that someday this power will shape the universe to its rightful form.」

After she laughed with a dry voice, this mysterious woman turned her head away.

「Wait! 」

I tried to follow the woman. Nonetheless, a strong wind blew on my path abruptly, and I couldn't move forward anymore. The woman knew that I was approaching her. I felt that she narrowed her eyes, and then, she took off the robe that covered her entire body.

Black, white, red, blue, gold...Her hair had a mixture of the most variety of colors. She had black wings that created that huge amount of wind. On this moment, the name of the enemy, which I've heard for several times in Exfolia, passed through my mind.

...The Evil God with Mottled Hair...!!

That devil creature stopped before leaving. She spoke to me without turning around.

「The hero you summoned is a great hero. He has a tremendous force and his far-sight cannot be underestimated. But, regardless of that...Ryuguuin Seiya will lose a precious person once again. This is not a prophecy. This is his determined future.」

「Wha...What are you implying... 」

The moment I tried to grasp the meaning of this talk, the devil creature disappeared from my sight and assimilated with the darkness.

—

...When I opened my eyes, I saw a faint brightness that lit my room because of the illumination that spread from the dim light of the lamp. When I looked at my window, I noticed that it was dark outside. It was still late at night.

Was that a dream just now? No...Wrong! The evil god with mottled hair entered my spiritual world just as Ceremonic did once before! Bu...But, how could that happen...? I was still in the God's realm, and yet...

I tried to organize my thoughts about this occurrence. Suddenly, I noticed that my body felt heavier than normal. I felt that my stomach swelled a little bit below the blanket of my bed.

...Wha...What's this...?

I moved the blanket away from my body. And there was...

screams extremely high

It was the face of a bloody woman with crushed eyes and nose! Ceremonic was hanging on top of my body!

「Gyaaaaaaaa!! 」

「You are not dead. You are not dead. You are not dead. You are not dead. You are not dead. You are not dead.」

Ceremonic's body, which spitted words of curse, was transparent! I could see everything through her body even though she stood right next to me!

Wa...Wa...Was she a Ghost!? Ceremonic, who was supposed to have died, revived as a ghostly form!? Ho...How is that even possible...!!

This was an impossible scenario! However, at the same time, something crossed through my mind, and I became convinced of this bizarre situation!

...It made sense...! This was surely the power of that devil creature...! So, that thing...was really the Evil God with Mottled Hair that lived currently in Exfolia...!

Right in front of me, Ceremonic's ghostly form opened her mouth without teeth.

「If I invade your body...Bloody Sisteria can be revived once again... 」

「Ugh! 」

Ceremonic's arm transformed as a black haze! It were about to enter my body through my mouth! I tried to block it with my hands, but it passed through my skin and headed towards my lips!

...Oh...Oh no...!

I didn't know what do to against this ghost opponent. When I felt that, my hope was lost...

「Destruction Operation Method the Fourth..."Astral Break". 」

A familiar voice echoed through the space of my room! At the same time, I saw a magical chain wrapped around the body of Ceremonic!

「Seiya!? 」

「...In fact, even though we returned to the past to get rid of your curse with the help of the Goddess of Time, I had a hunch that Ceremonic could reappear.」

A...Amazing!! As expected of Seiya!! Bu...But, where is his voice coming from!? I didn't see him anywhere in my room!!

I followed the source of the chain, and then, I saw that it came from under the bed. Before long, Seiya crawled out of the gap from my bed!

「Ehhhhh!? Why are you coming out of that place!? 」

「I concealed my breath, while waiting under your bed to see if something happened to you after you fell asleep.」

「Is this an urban legend!?* 」

Wha...What was this mix of feelings between creepiness, joyfulness, dependable and complicated emotions that I've felt?

Seiya spoke while looking directly at Ceremonic wrapped in chains.

「Hmm. That thing looks like Cross Tanathus, the god of death, which we encountered back in Geabrande...No, actually, it was with the power of the evil god that Ceremonic transformed into a ghost. That's why I used the destructive skill "Astral Break" because it is a method used against ghostly beings...」

While Seiya analyzed the situation, Ceremonic, who was tied up in a chain, began to move.

「Ohhhhhhhh...! 」

The Ceremonic's groaning voice echoed tremendously on my earlobes! Then, dozens of rotten arms appeared in my room...Actually, it was hundreds of them!

「Ehhhhh!? What on earth is happening!? 」

Those arms, along with some others that stretched from the ground, began to grab the chain that Seiya invoked to seal Ceremonic! They tried to pull it out and broke the chain into pieces!

「It...It can't be! Those arms broke the Astral Break! 」

Before long, the room was infested with crawling arms that looked like snakes! Moreover, Ceremonic was released from the chain and began to chase me!

「Kill. Kill. Kill. Kill. Kill. Kill. Kill. Kill. 」

...It looked like this ghostly form amplified its grudging power!! This room transformed into the territory of Ceremonic's curse!! Wha...What could we do in a place like this...!?

I stared immediately at Seiya to seek salvation in the midst of this nightmarish space. But, as usual, Seiya spoke with a calm demeanor.

「Until a while ago, Ceremonic's existence disappeared completely, and only the curse remained intact. However, after we solved the curse, the evil god used his power to transform Ceremonic's grudge into a

ghostly form. Therefore, we have no problem to dealing with this thing because it only exists thanks to the power of the evil god.」

「We...We have no problem to dealing with this thing, you say...!? 」

「Before I hid under your bed, I set up six obstruction stones around this room. I also managed to get Ceremonic's hair not too long ago. Besides that, I performed the sword dance for three hours within a radius of 500 meters away from Lista, where Ceremonic was supposed to be lurking around.」

「That's...No way...!!」

Seiya grabbed the Platinum Sword from his sheath. The Platinum Sword glowed several times brighter than usual, as if the sword itself were emitting a natural light!

「Sacred Hexagram...Activate.」

As soon as the room covered up in light, the countless of creepy arms that were crawling in the ground disappeared instantaneously as if they were swept away by a wave of light!

...The secret that the Great Goddess Isister gave to Seiya in order to defeat the Grand Lion...I couldn't believe that Seiya used it for a moment like this...!!

Ceremonic's ghostly body also decayed due to the wave of light! Even so, Ceremonic, whose exterior body became undead-like since the meat fell off the skin, still chased me but slowly!

「Ki...Ki...Kill. Kill. Kill. Kill. Kill. Kill. Kill. Kill. 」

「Oh no...!」

Wha...What a huge obsession with me!!

Such a horrible sight! My whole body shivered in fear! However...new chains wrapped around Ceremonic's ghostly form once again! First, the legs, then its torso and finally, the neck! I noticed that the chain of destruction extended, not only from Seiya's hands, but also from the walls and from the floor of the room!

Seiya shot an icy gaze towards Ceremonie.

[illegible]

Oh gosh!! He began to speak repeatedly like the ghost enemy!!

All of those chains that got out of my room covered Ceremonic's head, including the mouth, which recited recurrently the grudging words "Kill. Kill"! No, in fact, those chains didn't just wrap up Ceremonic's head...It spread all over its body as if it were a spider's web!

Ceremonic became completely wrapped in chains! Then, Seiya pulled a chain that came out of his arm! And “squeeze”! The swollen web cocoon contracted! Upon hearing a squeezing sound, I saw that a black evil mist scattered from between the chains to the floor!

...After Seiya’s chain of destruction disappeared, Ceremonic’s ghostly form was no longer present in my room.

「Did...Did you defeat it? This time for real? 」

「Yeah. Most probably. 」

I felt some weakness on my waist, so I sat abruptly on the floor of my room. After adjusting my breathing, I finally spoke to Seiya.

「Bu...But, even so. That really surprised me, you know...The Secret of the Six Hexagram Star. I had completely forgot that you had that skill...」

「Even though I couldn’t use it against the Grand Lion, I could always use it again on a different enemy. Actually, it’s an effective way to cut off the protection from the evil god. I never discarded this skill.」

「Is that so...Ah, but you used Ceremonic’s hair as a catalyst to performing that skill! Where on earth did you get that?」

「I got it when I went with you to confirm Ceremonic’s corpse. 」

「Ehh!! So, does that mean that, during that time, you were already thinking about activating the Six Hexagram!?!」

「It was just a precaution. 」

Seiya looked at the space where Ceremonic stood previously while talking to me. After staring fixedly for a while, Seiya declared the following words.

「I think it’s completely gone. Still, I think it’s better if I continue to watch your movement for the time being.」

Suddenly, Seiya’s words weighted on my mind.

「Listen. Does that mean that you’ll stay by my side from now on? Are you going to sleep with me at night?」

Then, Seiya spoke with piercing eyes.

「...I knew it. You’re fully okay now. So, that means that Ceremonic is finally gone. 」

「What!? That wasn’t the talk that you made with me just now!! C’mon, I want you to be a little more cautious just like you were moments ago...」

「Shut up. You're noisy. Go to bed. 」

「Ugh!! 」

He hit my face with a pillow.

When I took the pillow out of my face, I screamed, 「Why the hell did you do that to me!! 」 , but then, I noticed that Seiya had already opened the door and ventured out of my room.

「Ah! Wait! 」

However, Seiya didn't turn around and walked through the corridor without stopping...I was left alone in my room.

Ah, c'mon! I wanted to thank him properly! But, the mood got weird because he ended up hitting me with a pillow!

...After Seiya left my room, I sat down on my bed and reminisced about the battle against Ceremonic.

The curse that Ceremonic casted upon me was such a powerful and fearsome curse that even the Great Goddess Isister didn't know what to do in order to save me. Seiya went back in time and overturned the curse by tricking Ceremonic with my illusionary death. However, Ceremonic's obsession to kill me with her curse didn't disappear entirely and she resurrected as a ghost after gaining the power of the evil god. She attacked me again. Nevertheless, Seiya anticipated this, and this time, with the power of the Six Hexagram skill, he managed to defeat the enemy for good.

...What a great hero he was...

I felt a real sense of amazement at the succession of miracles that Seiya achieved so far, then...

『But, regardless of that...Ryuguuin Seiya will lose a precious person once again. This is not a prophecy. This is his determined future.』

Suddenly, the words of the evil god passed through my mind.

No doubt about it. Those words were directed towards me. In other words, the evil god tried to explain that my life would extinguish before we could even save Exfolia.

I see. My fate will be the same as Princess Tiana's fate. A dreadful destiny because the Demon King killed her in the end...

I clenched my fists then.

Wha...What the hell was with this determined future! Seiya will definitely save me! Besides...Don't she dare take me as fool! I'm a goddess after all! I won't have any regrets even if I die trying to save Exfolia from its enemies!

Seiya has helped me for countless of times. My mood reinvigorated and my optimistic feelings solidified. At this time, I certainly thought so.

At his time I still had no idea that a terrifying event that far exceeded my imagination was lying right ahead...

Chapter 101: Prospect

The next morning I got up early and headed to the Great Goddess Isister's room on my own. I wanted to report about the appearance of the "evil god with mottled hair".

「...There's a high possibility that that being is an evil god. 」

After listening to my story, the Great Goddess Isister spoke with a difficult expression on her face.

In fact, I thought that I knew what kind of being it was, based on the characteristic hair. I hoped this information would be useful. However, it seems that many evil gods exist, one could say that they are as many as the gods from the God's realm. I didn't know the name of that evil god, nor did I know the name of the evil god residing in Exfolia. Therefore, the Great Goddess Isister wasn't entirely sure if they were the same being.

「In addition to interfering with my foresight, that dark being also intervened with your spirit Listarte, even though you are currently in the God's realm. That evil god has a tremendous power. Even if that evil god can't harm you or Ryuguuin Seiya directly, you mustn't lose your vigilance.」

「I...I understand. 」

After I bowed deeply in respect, I left the Great Goddess Isister's room.

—

When I arrived at the Cafe De Celseus, I saw that Seiya, Kiriko and John Dae were already there with their belongings. I wanted to tell Seiya about my encounter with the evil god.

「Listen, Seiya. You know, I went to talk with the Great Goddess Isister about... 」

But, on this moment, I heard a bustling sound! An earth snake jumped out of my dress from my chest!

「Whoa!? What on earth!? 」

「There's no need to tell me about it. All of your conversations with Isister were wiretapped by that earth snake.」

「Wiretapped, you say!? Did you know that's a crime!? 」

「I'm not always eavesdropping. But, I wiretapped you because there was a small possibility that Ceremonic's curse could still be lingering in you. That's why I ended up hearing about the conversation you had with Isister.」

「Re...Really? A...Anyway, if you were listening to everything we said, then you must know what we talked about, right...?」

「I heard that the “evil god with mottled hair” in Exfolia could be the evil god that appeared in your sub consciousness. I didn’t hear anything new or special to be honest.」

「Ehh!! Then, Seiya, what’s your opinion about it!? 」

「Of course, there’s a high chance that your assumption is correct. That evil god can sense our movements and besides that, he managed to empower the Grand Lion, Oxelio and even Ceremonic...No normal monster is capable of doing that. That evil god is like a supervisor who doesn’t go to the frontlines but gives his instructions. The only problem is that we can’t create any countermeasures because that evil god resides in an altogether different dimension.」

Then, Seiya grabbed his luggage and carried it to his shoulders.

「Anyway, let’s head to Exfolia for now. First, summon the portal and direct the exit towards the Light of Hope.」

「Un...Understood... 」

I called John Dae and Kiriko afterwards. Now that the Cursed Sphere was gone, the portal opened directly to the square of the “Light of Hope” underground settlement without any problems.

Seiya and I, along with Kiriko and John Dae, dived into the portal.

—

「Hmm. I can’t believe this. Is this place below the ground? 」

「There’s such a big town in the underground...! 」

John Dae and Kiriko screamed in excitement when they saw the houses lit up by the light of the magical stones and the people who farmed in the fields.

The people who lived in this underground settlement were originally the inhabitants of Galvano. However, when the beast men ruled their town, these people hid themselves in this secret settlement with the power of Eich, a powerful earth magic user. Seiya defeated the Grand Lion, who also ruled this land. Yet, they had to keep living in the underground under the instructions of this cautious hero.

The inhabitants of the Light of Hope noticed our arrival. When they looked slightly at the Killing Machine, I put the hood over Kiriko’s head immediately, so that they won’t make a fuss about her. Before long, a large crowd of people surrounded us. Among them was the young Eich, the settlement leader, and Brut.

「Hero. Long time no see. 」

Seiya began to speak only about the main points of what happened so far, without exchanging greetings with Eich.

「In addition to the northern Machine Emperor Oxelio, the Emperor Ceremonie, who ruled the southern land, was also destroyed. You can finally go to the surface now.」

The people who were listening to the conversation between Seiya and Eich were astonished. I could only hear them say "Whoa!" from their mouths. I noticed that some people were even crying. Naturally. After they got attacked by the beast men, these poor people had to live a long life in the underground without real light. Now, they could finally return to the surface.

「The above town is protected by the golems I've created. So, you don't need to worry about any external threats. The golems will protect you from the monsters. Moreover, Eich. This underground settlement mustn't be destroyed. You must leave it intact as a shelter for the case of an emergency.」

「I understand. I appreciate your consideration for us. 」

「Well then, let's go to the surface now...Lista. 」

I summoned the portal in the Light of Hope. When Seiya went through the portal, all of the inhabitants followed after him.

—

Half-destroyed houses came into our view. Galvano was left devastated by the beast people. Even so...

「Light...! The sunlight...! 」

「We're finally liberated from the domination of the beast men...! 」

「We can live in the surface once again...! 」

The people from the Light of Hope were cheering with happiness after they went to the surface. Next to me, I noticed that Brut was rubbing his eyes.

「Oh my. Are you crying? 」

「Of...Of course not! The sun is too dazzling! 」

Uhhh, he put up a brave front! I thought that he was a cheeky guy, but I guess he had a cute side as well!

Nonetheless, Brut wasn't the only one. Everyone, both young and old, were shedding tears of great emotion. Such sight impressed both John Dae and Kiriko.

「I don't think my heart can take this anymore... 」

「I'm glad that they were able to come to the surface at last! 」

After a while, the inhabitants surrounded Seiya and me.

「Hero! Goddess! Thank you! Thank you so much! 」

「I should give you my utmost gratitude! 」

Thinking deeply about it, I still remember the first time we met with the inhabitants of the Light of Hope. Seiya and I were violently abused by them during that time. But now, they had tears of happiness and appreciation towards us.

...I'm truly glad it ended up this way...!

The liberation of the people from the Light of Hope was also the pivotal aspect where Seiya's hard work was fully rewarded.

I was so impressed by all of this that I almost cried alongside them. However, Seiya snapped his finger with a serious face.

「...Iron Dome. 」

Soon, I heard a huge rumbling sound! A large rock wall with 360° in diameter raised to the sky from the town's border, and fully covered Galvano in a second!

「...Ah? 」

I was taken aback after I saw the formation of the large dome! The sunlight was completely blocked, and Galvano had turned into a dark world!

「What!? It's dark again!? 」

「Wha...What happened just now!? 」

「Mom, I'm scared...!! 」

The inhabitants shouted aloud because of the sudden darkness! I also shouted at Seiya!

「Seiya!? Why did you create the Iron Dome!? Can't you see that it got even darker than it was in the underground!?!」

「The sudden sunlight after a long underground life is not good for their eyes. So, I blocked the day's light.」

「No, that's not it!! If you do this, the purpose of coming to the surface is meaningless!!」

「Everyone was crying. Can't you see that their eyes were burnt by the sunlight?」

「They didn't cry because their eyes were hurt!! They cried because they were blissful!!」

Then, Seiya shook his head slightly.

「I don't understand them. What a troublesome people. 」

「You're the one who's troublesome because you don't understand anybody!!」

The inhabitants were heartbroken because of the sudden darkness. But, before long, all of them regained their spirits once Seiya's Iron Dome shrank back.

「All right. Everything is okay here. Lista. Let's go to Tarmine next. 」

「Ye...Yes... 」

As Seiya instructed, I opened the portal that led to Tarmine.

We left the town of Galvano with a smile after we said our goodbyes to the delighted inhabitants of the Light of Hope, including Eich and Brut.

—

After arriving in Tarmine, Seiya gave John Dae some instructions.

「John Dae. Go call Queen Carmilla. 」

「I'm okay with it, but for what reason? 」

「I'm going to have a meeting with the Queen now. 」

After giving an order to John Dae, Seiya headed to the conference room in the royal palace. Kiriko and I followed Seiya.

There was a large rectangular table in the conference room used to organize the military strategy of the kingdom. Seiya sat on the upper seat. While Kiriko and I sat on chairs placed at the corner of the table.

「Miss Lista. What is the purpose of this meeting? 」

「Huh? Actually, I don't have any clue about the purpose of this meeting. 」

Eventually, the Queen appeared with John Dae and sat in front of us. After looking at everyone seated around the table, Seiya finally opened his mouth.

「By defeating the northern Machine Emperor Oxelio and the southern Emperor Ceremonic, one can finally say that the Radral continent is free from the danger of invasion. It has become reasonably safe now. Therefore, I'm going to talk about the future...」

Seiya stood up from his chair and walked towards the world map of Exfolia exposed in the wall. He stood right beside the map while looking at us. He was like a teacher at school.

「We're going to fight against the last emperor in Exfolia. 」

I spoke directly to John Dae, who sat in front of me.

「Is that so, John Dae? 」

「Yeah. Now that the Beast Emperor, the Machine Emperor, and Curse Emperor are gone, the Death Emperor Silshete is the last right-handed man of the Demon King.」

「The Death Emperor Silshete, you say. It means that if we defeat him, only the Demon King will remain!」

「Hey, you there. You're noisy. Shup up and listen to me. 」

「Ah, I'm sorry. I'll be careful from now on... 」

He really looked like a cautious teacher who reprimanded me severely for speaking aloud in the classroom...Wait a minute!! What the hell was this student thing!! I was a goddess, correct!?

Without knowing my frustrating feelings, Seiya pointed to the map with his sheath as if he were using a pointing stick like a teacher.

「The Death Emperor resides in the Aerith continent, which lies across the sea from the western side of the Radral continent. Further north from the Aerith continent, is the remote Gastreid continent, where is located the Demon King's castle. Originally, after I got the permission from Isister, I planned to use the portal to Aerith continent to defeat the Death Emperor. After succeeding that mission, I'd head north to the Gastreid continent.」

Soon, Seiya's eyes transformed like sharp knives.

「But, per my information, it seems that Artemaeus is hibernating to accumulate more power. If that's true, then I'd like to use this chance to defeat him for good.」

The Queen looked surprised.

「In other words, are you going to defeat Artemaeus before the Death Emperor!? 」

「Yeah. In fact, when I knew that Artemaeus was accumulating power, I considered this strategy immediately. But, Tarmine was in the imminent danger of invasion. So, I couldn't advance with my plans until the defense of Radral continent was accomplished.」

I swallowed a lot of fresh saliva into my throat.

Se...Seiya had been thinking about such a bold strategy! And...This may be a pretty good strategy! Even the evil god might think, that based on Seiya's cautious personality that we'll go after the Death Emperor first, and then leave the Demon King for the last battle!

After a moment of silence, John Dae began to giggle a little.

「Interesting! That's a drastic strategy coming from a person like you! 」

The blood from the former general was bursting with excitement.

「If that's the case, then do you plan to invade the Gastreid continent now!? 」

However, Seiya shook his head.

「Just listen to rest of the story...Can't you see what's going on with this part of the map?」

Seiya drew a circle with his sheath on the Gastreid continent where the Demon King was located, and the Aerith continent where the Death Emperor resided.

I stared fixedly at the map, but I didn't understand the meaning of Seiya's question. Everyone kept silent, except Kiriko, who murmured after looking at that part of the world map.

「Two continents...They're not too far from one another. That geographic area looks similar with the sea between Radral continent and the southern continent...」

Then, Seiya nodded positively.

「That's correct, Kiriko. The Gastreid and Aerith continents are only separated by a small sea. If you have a ship, you can go back and forth in a few days. I have the desire to aim at the hibernating Demon King, but if I leave the Death Emperor alive and go to the Gastreid continent, then there's a high probability that he might attack us coming from the south to the north unexpectedly. Summing up...」

Seiya spoke the final verdict words.

「After I defeat the Death Emperor, I will defeat the Demon King. 」

John Dae and I were astounded by Seiya's final decision.

「Well...you see...So, you're going to stick to your original plan after all...!! 」

「Tha...That's right...!! What kind of meeting is this...!? 」

「It's called "the meeting that announces the prospect of being invaded and not being invaded..." 」

「I doubt that a meeting like that even exists in the first place!! 」

I screamed at Seiya, but the Queen just said "easy, easy" to us.

「Somehow, after I heard him say, "after I defeat the Death Emperor, I will defeat the Demon King"...I thought that his decision was the right one. It's definitely better to fight through an exact order than to use one or two tactics that would make us regret.」

John Dae asked Seiya after a deep sigh.

「...Ah. Then, are you going to the Aerith continent where the Death Emperor is now? 」

「No. I'm going back to the heavenly world. 」

「Ehhhhh!? Are you going to the God's realm once again!? What was the meaning for us to come to Exfolia now!?!」

「The purpose of coming to Exfolia was to liberate the inhabitants of the Light of Hope from the underground settlement, and tell the Queen about my plans for the future. After this, I'm going to train in the heavenly world to prepare for the battle against the Death Emperor. Do you have any complaints?」

「I don't have any...but, wha...what a bothersome man you are...!! 」

John Dae was frustrated. Yeah, I understood him well. I knew exactly what it felt like.

Still, I did as Seiya asked me to do and I opened the portal to the God's realm. Then, John Dae, with his pissed rotting face, began to follow us.

「Oh my. John Dae, are you coming with us as well? 」

「Eh!? "Are you coming" you say...I'm not your comrade anymore!? But, we've been together all this time...My...My Queen!! You don't mind that I'm part of the hero's party, correct!?!」

「I'm fine with it. But, does the hero and the goddess really need you now? 」

Then, John Dae gave me a strong look.

「Go...Goddess!! Now that I've come this far, I want to devote myself to save the world!! The Death Emperor probably has the same attributes as the Curse Emperor!! I'm not entirely dead but I'm strong against curses, so I'm pretty convenient, no!?!」

「Eh. What should I do? 」

I felt that Kiriko pulled the hem of my sleeve.

「I...I think that we should bring Mister John Dae with us! 」

「Kiriko...! You're right! We've been working together as part-timers in the God's realm!」

「I know that about you two. But, John Dae has a really bad smell. 」

John Dae shouted aloud after he heard my reluctant words.

「The...Then, I should carry a scented tea with me from now on!! 」

...Hmm! John Dae was willing to spill some tea onto his head for the sake of coming with us! John Dae was so desperate that I burst out laughing!

「Ahahaha! It can't be helped though! What do you think, Seiya? Are you willing to take John Dae for one more trip?」

John Dae didn't like my attitude towards him. So, he spilled some harsh words against me.

「You know what! I may have a bad smell coming from my rotten flesh...But, you smell bad as well because you have a nauseating body odor!!」

「What!? Wha...What the hell are you saying to a lady, you hypocritical undead!!...Kiri!! I never stink, do I!?」

「Yes! I'm a machine, so Miss Lista's bad odor is almost unimportant to me!」

Ugh...So, I did have bad body odor! The same thing happened in Geabrande! Kiriko was a pure young girl that couldn't lie, so it must be true...But, anyways, why did I have a bad body odor even though I was goddess myself...?

Kiriko encouraged me after she saw how depressed I was.

「But, when I'm with Mister John Dae, I don't care about Miss Lista's smell! 」

John Dae's rotten smell seemed to be stronger. I smiled at John Dae with a devilish grin and placed my hand on his shoulder.

「John Dae. Let's go together. 」

「No, what the hell is wrong with you!? I'm not your deodorant, you know!? 」

Seiya sighed after he witnessed our arguing.

「To be honest, I'd rather leave you two behind because you both stink so bad. But, I must take Lista with me because she is a goddess, and I also want to use the decayed body of John Dae for something I have to do in the heavenly world...」

「The...Then, Mister Seiya? 」

「Yeah. It can't be helped. Kiriko. I'll take them with me. 」

Kiriko spoke with a cheerful voice.

「I'm glad! Miss Lista! Mister John Dae! We can go together! 」

「Ye...Yes. Great... 」

「Tha...That's right. Well...It is great...I guess. 」

Before I knew it, Seiya placed John Dae and me in a lower rank than Kiriko herself.

Chapter 102: The Goddess of Seclusion

As soon as we returned to the God's realm, Seiya headed towards Celseus' cafe. John Dae, Kiriko and I followed him.

Seiya approached Aria and Adenela, who enjoyed a cup of tea at the garden table. Adenela's eyes glittered when she noticed Seiya's presence.

「Se...Seiya...! It...It's been a long time since I've seen you...! 」

「Yeah. Go over there. 」

Seiya pushed Adenela away from him with his sheath in order to speak with Aria...Eh, he treated her coldly as usual!! How cruel!! The worst was that Adenela didn't even mind his bad manners towards her!!

「Aria. Do you know a god with an effective technique against an enemy with no flesh nor bones? 」

「In other words, a ghost-type enemy you ask... 」

Aria put her hand on her chin to think about it. Meanwhile, I asked John Dae the following question.

「Hey, John Dae. Is the Death Emperor a ghost-type enemy? 」

「I don't know much about it. But, as the name suggests, the Death Emperor is a monster that probably has the power to control death. Even if the Death Emperor itself is not a ghost, there is a high possibility that he'll release many ghost monsters to battle us. The hero is right; we have to be prepared for that possible scenario. 」

「Hmm. Ah, but Seiya! Isn't your special flame magic effective against ghost-types? Besides, you've already mastered Lady Valkyrie's Astral Break, isn't that so? 」

However, Seiya shook his head.

「What will happen if my flame magic doesn't work? Astral Break is effective, but on the other hand, that's the only skill I know where I can go up against a ghost monster. And that's no good. I want to learn a variety of techniques. 」

Aria nodded slightly upon hearing Seiya's words.

「You can definitely inflict great damage on all sorts of ghostly enemies if you learn the skills of the Goddess of Seclusion, Nephitet. 」

The Goddess of Seclusion, Nephitet...I've never heard of her before. But, it sounded as if that goddess could teach Seiya about an effective technique against ghost monsters!

「Aria. Where is Lady Nephitet? 」

「She's in the Graveyard of Gods. 」

「I see, Graveyard of Gods...Huh, graveyard, you say!? There is a graveyard in the God's realm!? But gods don't die!!」

「It's very rare, but some gods were killed while rescuing other worlds because of powerful weapons such as the Chain Destruction. Besides...」

「Besides? 」

「Well...There's a lot of things going on in the God's realm... 」

Aria was going to say something to me, but stopped midway. I felt a little bit bad with myself because of my curiosity; therefore, I only listened to the address of the Graveyard of Gods located in the God's realm.

—

The Goddess of Chance, Rusti, lived in the "Heavenly Mountain of Seclusion". At the foot of her hut, stood the Graveyard of Gods.

「Uhhh...Miss Lista. Somehow, I'm a bit scared about this place... 」

「It...It's fine, Kiri! This is the God's realm after all! 」

I tried to comfort Kiriko, who was extremely afraid. Actually, we were walking through crosses and stone monuments lined up in a deserted foothill. It was an eerie scene. Even the sky was cloudier than usual.

I looked at a nearby stone monument.

...It was written, "Age of death: 35422442".

That stone monument was the grave of a god who lived a great number of years. Why did he die?

While I was wondering about that...

「...The eternal life of us gods can expire instantly without us even noticing about it. 」

screams

Suddenly, I heard a voice of a strange woman from behind my back. I screamed because it frightened me. I immediately turned around to see who had spoken.

There was a woman with a deep blue long hair. A beautiful but tired face, with a triangular white cloth on her forehead. But, what surprised me the most was...

...She...She had no legs!?

There was no under part coming from that woman's torso! She was floating gently in the air! Then I freaked out for real...

「Oh my. You must be surprised. But, don't worry. I am the goddess who manages this graveyard.」

Go...Goddess!? If that's true, then that meant that this ghostly person was...The Goddess of Seclusion, Nephitet!!

For some weird reason, Nephitet was signaling at me.

「It's all right. Come over here. 」

「Eh!? 」

「You can see from my face. I won't harm you. Don't be shy, because we are fellow gods.」

Nephitet put her hand on my shoulder and whispered with an imperfect speech.

「You came here to become an "Eta God"*, am I right? 」

「"Eta God"!? What's that!? 」

「Eta God is a deity who is tired of living through the eternal time of gods and chooses to die by coming here.」

「Is...Is that so...But, you're wrong!! I didn't come here to become an Eta God!! 」

「What? I'm wrong? I thought that you came here to end of your life because of your thin-skinned face.」

How rude! I could still live for a longer period of time! I wasn't tired at all!

「Then, why did you come here? 」

I tried to explain why we came to the Graveyard of Gods, but...

「Get out of my way, you Eta God. 」

Seiya pushed me away.

「I just said that I'm not an Eta God!! 」

I yelled at Seiya like always. But, it seemed that Seiya could only see Nephitet and nobody else.

「I want to learn a technique that is effective against ghosts. 」

「Ghosts, you say. There are many types. There are ghosts that don't work well with fire magic, while there are ghosts that are strong against ice, and other ghosts that are strong against light. Even so...」

Nephitet pulled out a slender sword from her waist. At first glance, it was a weird-shaped sword with nothing special about it...

「...Ghostbuster. 」

At the same time Nephitet professed those words, the slender sword became covered with a white membrane.

「Wha...What's that...? 」

「I gave my sword a spiritual power. Now this sword became the focus of "spiritual substance". This sword is capable of inflicting damage on many kinds of ghosts.」

「Oh. So, a sword that commands spiritual energy can perform successful spiritual attacks. I'm sure it will work against all types of ghosts. Good. Tell me more about the "Ghostbuster".」

Seiya was the great cautious hero as usual. Yet, Nephitet didn't seem to be that impressed about him. She just waved her head gently.

「First, you have to acquire the spiritual power in order to transmit it to your sword. 」

Upon saying those words, Nephitet brought an object made of wood.

「You will become a wandering spirit if you hit your head on this mallet.** You can train your spiritual strength after you become a spirit yourself.」

Ehhhh!?! First of all, Seiya had to become a wandering spirit himself!?

I thought it was a dubious practice...

「Okay. I understand. 」

Surprisingly, Seiya accepted it without any problems. When he received the wooden mallet from Nephitet...

bang

Seiya slammed my head against the mallet without hesitation!

「Ugh!?! 」

Why...Why the hell did he make me do it!? Just try it yourself!!

I tried to get angry with him. But, strangely enough, my body felt weirdly light and fluffy.

...On this precise moment. I was looking down at the fallen me from up in the air.

Whoaaaaa!?

I noticed the presence of a white thread that came from my fallen head, which connected to my spiritual head. I felt that this occurrence was somewhat similar from when I left my body when Seiya and Valkyrie tried to cease Ceremonic's curse. However, there was a difference this time...

「Uhhh...! The goddess has separated in two! So, the second body is the spiritual body!」

「I...I can see another Miss Lista from the body of Miss Lista who fell unconscious! 」

John Dae and Kiriko were able to see me this time.

「Kiri! Can you hear my voice? 」

「Yes! I can hear you! 」

I could have a normal conversation with the ones who were still alive even though I became a wandering spirit. But, when I tried to touch Kiriko, my hand slipped through.

After seeing the result, Seiya murmured.

「So, Nephitet. How can she return to her original body? 」

「She just needs to overlap her spiritual body with the body that has fallen on the ground. If she does that, she will return to her original body.」

「All right. Lista. Try it. 」

Why...Why was I obliged to be transformed into this state and still be ordered as a slave...!

While I felt dissatisfaction and irritation, I tried to lie down to fit with my fallen body.

「Ah... 」

Then, my spiritual consciousness returned to my original body.

Ah, great! I was finally back! Just when I woke up...

bang

I felt a violent shock on my head. Then, I fell down and became a spirited body once again!

screams like a mad woman

「I wanted to try it twice, just to be in case...Yeah. I'm convinced now. I'll do it too.」

「Don't give me the "I'll do it too"!! Don't use me twice as a guinea pig experiment, you cruel idiot!!」

However, my words were useless, because Seiya ignored me like always and had already turned into a spirited body. The original body of Seiya was lying on the ground side by side with my original body, who also remained in the ground.

Nephitet spoke to our spirited bodies.

「Well then, the spiritual training will start now. 」

「Spi...Spiritual...training, you say? 」

「Let's make a deeper progress in the Nikola Tesla's research# in order to ascend the astral body from the properties of scandium## after a proper psychic study.」

I didn't really understand the meaning of her words, but...somehow, they sounded occult and sinister!! I wondered what kind of training it was!?

Then, Nephitet looked fixedly at Seiya.

「For now, you should do 100 sit-ups and 100 push-ups. 」

「Wait a second!! That's a hard-physical training!! 」

I really thought that it was a spiritual training...

「Yeah. Okay. 」

Seiya accepted it without hesitation and immediately began the push-ups on the ground.

We...Well, it shouldn't be a problem since Seiya always liked the hard-physical training. Even so, I didn't understand the meaning of this type of practice considering the purpose of gaining spiritual power...

After staring at Seiya for a while, Nephitet brought a white liquid in a cup and gave it to Seiya.

「This is called "Pro Spirit", drink it. 」

「"Pro Spirit"!? What's that!? 」

「This drink is a rich liquid containing essential amino-spirit acids that are necessary for the formation of a healthy spirited body. Your spiritual training will improve if you drink it.」

「Spi...Spiritual training, or should you say muscular training...!! 」

Seiya received the cup and looked at it with serious eyes. But, suddenly, he turned around, picked my nose aggressively and I opened my mouth impulsively!

「Ugh!? 」

The “Pro Spirit” drink was poured into my opened mouth!

「Wha...ugh...you...doin’...ugh!? 」

The liquid went through my throat.

「How is it? Is there any change in your physical condition or your spiritual essence? 」

「Ugh...Agh...Hmm, hey you...how dare you try to use me as an experiment every time you need, damn youuuuuu!!」

「Hmm. You seem fine. 」

「It is a safe drink. The Pro Spirit is a secure liquid that acts as a spiritual supplement.」

「All right. Then, I’ll drink it too. 」

「Do your best to reach the status of a spiritual macho. 」

And then, Nephitet slapped my shoulder and Seiya’s shoulder with such a great enthusiasm...No, why the hell was I being forced to drink a spiritual liquid!? I shouldn’t be drinking that Pro Spirit because I didn’t really want to become a spiritual macho!!

I was extremely enraged. So, I floated rapidly and returned to my original body. After that, Seiya continued with his spiritual training.

John Dae looked at Seiya with big admiration, who kept working hard on his spiritual-body training.

「Even so, it’s quite amazing, isn’t it? He keeps pushing harder and harder... 」

I saw many bubbles of sweat floating in the air. I didn’t know why a spirited body was sweating, but anyways, after seeing the figure of Seiya that kept working hard beyond the limits of human beings...

「So...So cool...! 」

Kiriko murmured with amazement. For sure, Seiya was looking masculine and, extremely bulky and attractive on this physical training.

After a long set of push-ups, Kiriko approached Seiya, who was drinking his Pro Spirit liquid.

「I want to be strong like Mister Seiya one day! 」

「Oh. Do you want to drink the Pro Spirit as well? 」

「Ah, no...That wasn’t what I meant... 」

Kiri didn't say she wanted to drink that damned liquid. What's wrong with that person...

「It will be counterproductive if you push yourself too much. Let's take a break now. 」

Then, Seiya finally returned to his original body.

「There's something I want to ask before the break is over. Nephitet. There's this white thread that connects the original body to the head of my spiritual body...I'll die if it's cut?」

「It's a spirited thread. Certainly, if someone cuts your spirited thread, you'll die if you let it go for a long period of time. But, it won't be a problem if it's for a short time. By the way, you can also connect your spirited body to another user and fix it in the meantime.」

「Oh. So, for example, is it possible to separate the spirited body from its original body and put it in an altogether different body?」

Then, Seiya approached John Dae and hit his head with the wooden mallet.

「Agh!? 」

A spiritual body appeared from the fallen John Dae's body.

「Hey you, what the hell did you do that to me so suddenly!! 」

John Dae, who became a wandering spirit, was extremely angry with Seiya. However, I noticed that Nephitet tried to give some weird scissors to Seiya.

「You're going to cut the spirited thread, aren't you? If so, then you should use these spirited scissors to detach the soul from its body without inflicting pain.」

Nevertheless, Seiya grabbed the thread that connected John Dae's original body to his spirited body with both of his hands, and shredded it in half with his brute strength!

「It hurtsssssssss!! Why...Why did you do that, you bastarrrrrrrrrrr!!」

「Because it's a bother. So, I just pulled it out with my hands. 」

「What's a bother!? Just use that damned spirited scissors!! 」

Seiya completely ignored John Dae's screaming and took out the golden doll from his pocket. That creepy doll was quite familiar...Actually, that doll was the doll that Seiya created to resemble myself.

「This is the Lista Hair Doll that I've made with Lista's hair. I made this in order to create the Great Tarte, but it's a waste to throw it away, so I'll use it for further experiments.」

Seiya wrapped the free white thread of John Dae's spirited body around the Lista Hair Doll! John Dae's spirited body was sucked into the small doll!

「Ah!? Thi...This is...truly...myself now!? 」

Oh gosh! I heard John Dae's voice coming from the Lista Hair Doll! Before long, the creepy doll began to shake its limbs as if it gained life!

Kiriko and I screamed incessantly after we witnessed that horrific and creepy scene!

「Gyaaaa!! The Lista Hair Doll is moving on its own!! 」

「Wha...What a scary thing!! 」

However, Seiya spoke with his arms folded.

「Okay. It worked fine. 」

「What worked fine!? 」

Both the doll John Dae and I shouted in unison! I really didn't understand the meaning of this childish act!

Nephitet approached us and said the following words.

「If you leave it for too long, the spirited body will assimilate into the doll and it won't be able to return to its original state.」

John Dae, who became the haired doll, freaked out.

「Ju...Just hurry up and make me normal again!! 」

「Thi...This doll gives me such an awful feeling!! Seiya, get him back!! 」

「Okay. 」

Seiya hit the Lista Hair Doll with the wooden mallet afterwards. After removing the white thread wrapped around the doll from the head of John Dae's spirit, Seiya tied the white thread onto John Dae's head from his real body.

After John Dae got up from his original state, he asked the following question with great anxiety.

「Did...Did you attach the white thread properly onto my body!? Won't it break again!?」

「It's fine, don't fret...I mean, probably. 」

「Why don't you act more empathetic towards other people!? If you're cautious, then be careful on how you deal with other people as well!!」

John Dae was angry. Yet, Seiya nodded satisfactorily, although with an expressionless face.

「Today was quite fruitful. I managed to witness some signs of resolution towards the other case.」

—

After a short break, Seiya became a wandering spirit once again. He resumed his hard-physical training that seemed to repeat endlessly.

「...Let's go back. 」

We left Seiya quietly without disturbing his supposed-spiritual training, and we headed to Celseus' cafe.

When I met Celseus at his coffee shop, I asked him if John Dae and Kiriko could stay with him while we were in the God's realm. Celseus accepted my request promptly. It seemed that Celseus was fond of them. After all, they all worked together at the café not too long ago. He was going to lend them a room to stay for the meantime.

It was too early to rest, so the three of us were at the table in the cafe.

Kiriko spoke happily.

「I'm glad that Mister Seiya resolved his own troubles! 」

Thinking about it, he did say, "I managed to witness some signs of resolution towards the other case". I didn't really know what kind of other case he was referring to, but...Well, it was nice that he managed to solve it.

Suddenly, I noticed that John Dae was silent and with a difficult expression on his face. No wonder. He wasn't the only victim in Seiya's hands. Seiya also messed up with me today. I was a little sympathetic with John Dae and asked him to have a cup of coffee.

「I understand why you're angry. So, why don't you have a cup of coffee to cheer up? 」

After receiving the warm cup of coffee, John Dae mumbled with a different tone.

「I'm not angry. Well, I was angry during that time...But you see, now that I've thought deeply about it, maybe he was trying to... 」

However, John Dae shook his head greatly.

「No...No! There's no way that he'd do that in the first place! Oh my, I'm really tired today! I'm going to rest! 」

「...John Dae? 」

John Dae headed to his room abruptly, after leaving me and Kiriko absolutely confused.

Chapter 103: A Present

Next morning.

I went to the Graveyard of Gods of the God's realm to see how everything was going. Seiya was still working hard on his spiritual training. Seiya's spirited body seemed to be bulkier than yesterday.

Next to me, Nephitet nodded with satisfaction.

「Yes, yes. He has become quite a spiritual macho. 」

That's right. He would be able to invoke the divine Ghostbuster if he strengthened his spiritual strength by training the spirited body. This skill dwelled in the real spiritual power in order to transmit it to the actual sword.

「Lady Nephitet! If Seiya is that good now, maybe he's ready to start the Ghostbuster training soon! 」

「He can do it now if he wants to. But, if he keeps working hard and keeps squeezing the spirited body to the max, then he can also aim for the top prize in the Spiritual Celebration called "Best Spirit Contest". It's a festival where the great spirited machos gather together. 」

「Ah...No...I'm sure that he isn't interested in a contest like that...! 」

「That's a shame. All right, after lunch break, I'll start his training so that he can give his sword the spiritual power it needs. 」

I finally got Nephitet's permission to advance with Seiya's training. I spoke with the spirited Seiya, who kept practicing without stopping.

「Seiya! You can take a break! It seems like you have enough spiritual power to master the Ghostbuster now! 」

「Not enough. I'll train for a bit longer. 」

「Ehh!? Do...Don't tell me that you're going to participate in the Best Spirit Contest!? 」

「Are you an idiot? I don't have time for things like that. I just want to increase my spiritual strength. That way, the power of the Ghostbuster will go up as well. 」

「Is...Is that so. I'm relieved...But, don't overdo it too much. Take a break, okay? 」

Seiya kept doing his spiritual training without saying much. I decided to visit John Dae and Kiriko in the meantime.

Since it was early in the morning, the Cafe De Celseus wasn't opened yet. However, I noticed that near the garden table, John Dae and Kiriko were discussing something with Celseus, who was like a form of master to them.

「Celseus is the Swordsman God, am I right? 」

「Mister Celseus, please, I beg you! 」

「Hmm... 」

Celseus had his arms crossed with a tough-looking face. Hmm? What's going on over there?

「Good morning, Kiri. What's going on here? 」

「Ah, Miss Lista! Good morning! Well, you see, I was asking Mister Celseus to do sword training during the breaks of helping in the cafe!」

John Dae looked at me with eyes full of determination.

「I'm officially a member of the hero's party. So, I want to use my sword to help save the world. That's why I want to improve my sword skills.」

「Hmm. I see. So, Kiri, do you also feel the same way? 」

「Ye...Yes! I also want to become strong and help Mister Seiya! 」

Well. Seiya will probably defeat the enemy on his own even if these two became capable enough after their respective trainings. But, since they were so eager to help...

「Hey, Celseus. Why don't you teach them your swordsman skills? 」

I asked him to train them, but Celseus had an apprehensive expression on his face.

「I've already retired from swordsmanship. 」

「Ah, but...even if you retire, you're still the Swordsman God. 」

I knew the real reason why Celseus was reluctant. The Spartan Training* with Seiya became a huge trauma for him. That's why he began to hate swords.

Nonetheless, John Dae grabbed Celseus' hands.

「I aspired to follow the path of a swordsman when I was young! So, it's a huge honor to meet the Swordsman God of the heavenly world!」

「...Hmm. 」

「Please! Celseus! 」

「I...I implore you! Mister Celseus! 」

Celseus exhaled a big sigh after the two of them lowered their heads. Then, he took out his chef's white robe and put his armor. He threw two wooden swords under their feet.

「So? What are you waiting for? Just grab those wooden swords. 」

「Is...Is it all right for you, Celseus!? 」

「The morning preparations for the cafe are completed. It'll be fine if I teach them for a little while.」

「Mister Celseus!! Thank you very much!! 」

「Yeah. My training regimen is tough. Both of you show me what you've got. 」

...Celseus looked somewhat cool on his Swordsman God persona.

John Dae grabbed his wooden sword and launched it towards Celseus' head.

「Ugh, what!? 」

In addition, Kiriko used her wooden sword to strike Celseus' stomach.

「Agh!?...Ju...Just wait!! A moment!! Please, wait one moment!! 」

After getting hit hard by the two of them, Celseus activated his clairvoyance ability to see their status. His face got extremely red when he started to fret.

「Ki...Kiriko's attack power exceeds 80,000 points...!? And John Dae's attack power is over 100,000 points!? You're already strong enough!!」

Well, both John Dae and Kiriko were residents of Exfolia, a world with a SS-rank difficulty of salvation. It was rather obvious that they wouldn't be average beings.

However, both John Dae and Kiriko shook their heads.

「I still have long ways to go! I want to become stronger! 」

「Me too! I want to be as strong as Mister Celseus! 」

「Ah, no...In fact, my attack power is over 30,000 points... 」

It seemed that the two of them didn't hear Celseus' voice, who probably sounded like a mosquito's lower buzz.

「Mister Celseus! Don't worry about it! Let's do it seriously! 」

「Kiriko! He's a Swordsman God! Words won't work on him! We should use our swords against his sword! Let's turn Celseus into a serious mode with our own power!」

「I understand! I will do my best! 」

And then, John Dae and Kiriko began to beat Celseus with their wooden swords!

「Sto...Stop it, John Dae, Kiri!! Can't you see that Celseus is foaming from his mouth!? 」

—

「...I did something very bad to Mister Celseus. 」

「Yeah. But, you know, he's the Swordsman God. That's why we never guessed that he was that weak in the first place...」

John Dae and Kiriko sat down on the café's table chairs with unfathomable expressions, after they carried Celseus to his room at the back of the cafe when he fainted and foamed from his mouth.

Then, Seiya arrived at the cafe. He brought a long package wrapped in a white cloth.

「Ah, Seiya? Has your spiritual training finished? 」

「Yeah. I've had enough for the meantime. 」

「So, you can rest a little bit until the afternoon. 」

I gave him an empty chair, but Seiya didn't sit and showed us his long package.

「Eh? What's that? 」

「I used my spare time to make an experiment with synthesis...I've finally completed it.」

「Synthesis...Does that mean that you didn't take any break all this time!? Are you okay!? Won't you pass out again!?」

「I'm fine. I've already got a big load of worry out of my shoulders. 」

A big load of worry out of his shoulders? Did that mean that his "other case" was cleared up?

「Anyways, look at this. "Killer Sword"...This is my new sword that is going to replace the Platinum Sword.」

When Seiya took off the white cloth, I saw that three sheaths were placed inside the long package. Then, Seiya pulled out the sheaths, and I saw three shining silvery blades with jagged edges.

「Oh! Killer Sword! Looks like a wonderful sword! 」

John Dae stared fixedly at the swords. He looked amazed to see the Killer Sword that Seiya created himself. I used my Appraisal Skills, but I saw that it was an S-rank sword. It meant that it was just a little bit more aggressive and durable than the Platinum Sword itself.

I was very pleased to see that Seiya was able to synthesize a strong sword because the weaponry shops in Exfolia were scarce. Yet, I felt a bit worried about it. So, I asked him about my worries.

「Ex...Excuse me, Seiya...But, how did you make that sword? 」

「I used the Grand Lion's hair, a part of Oxelio's metallic body, and finally Ceremonic's hair combined with the Plus A. I put everything together alongside the properties of the Platinum Sword.」

He had been collecting some body parts of the executive class enemies for the purpose of his synthesis experiments!? What a huge obsession....!! Bu...But, even so, what concerned me the most was...

「Sorry, but...I'm a bit curious about the "Plus A" part of your synthesis...What is it! 」

I was convinced that my hair was taken in large quantities. Nonetheless...

「Don't worry. I only used one string of Lista's hair this time around. 」

「Ehh!! Just one!? Not a hundred!? 」

「Yeah. Still, instead, the creation of the Killer Sword required a large amount of undead hair. That's why I took a hundred of John Dae's hair.」

I was relieved. Still, John Dae looked infuriated upon realizing the whole truth.

「Yo...You used that ridiculous amount of my hair!? When!? 」

「You are a corpse. So, you don't have to worry about baldness since your hair fell from getting putrid.」

「No...Hey, wait a second!! That's not a good excuse!! ...Can't you see that I'm not bald!? Don't you have a mirror!?」

Seiya ignored John Dae, who screamed aloud, and offered one of three swords to Kiriko.

「Kiriko. You want to be strong, am I right? 」

「Eh...Ah, yes! 」

「Then, take one sword with you. 」

「Tha...Thank you very much! 」

How odd and rare for Seiya to give one of his swords to a fellow comrade!

Suddenly, I noticed that something was written on the bottom of Kiriko's Killer Sword handle. When I looked closely at it...

...The name "Kiriko" was engraved on the sword.

「Eh! Kiri, your name is carved on the sword! 」

「I'm happy!! I will cherish this sword!! 」

「...If we mix up the swords we'll lose track of whom it belongs to, that's why they need names.」

Hmm. What kind of scene was this? I never saw Seiya give a present to somebody before. This was the first time I witnessed such occurrence.

Seiya also gave a Killer Sword to John Dae, who carefully touched his hair.

「I have one for you too. Grab it. 」

「Ah, yeah. I have complicated feelings now...But, regardless of that, I'll take your sword appreciatively. Thanks.」

「Hey, hey. Did you carve John Dae's name on it too? 」

Kiriko and I gazed at the handle of the sword that John Dae received from Seiya. And there was...

...It was written "Dead".

「What the hell is wrong with my name!! 」

John Dae shouted at Seiya, but...

「I think that name is easier to understand whom that sword belongs to. 」

Seiya spoke as if it were nothing special. I laughed a little bit because it was the usual Seiya...

「I made one for you too. 」

「I...I have one for myself as well!? 」

I said the following words to Seiya after I received a Killer Sword.

「We...Well, I bet that you wrote "Idiot" or "Dummy Goddess" on the sword!! 」

And then, I moved the handle of the sword slowly because I was a bit wary to find out what Seiya wrote about myself. And there was...

...Nothing was carved in the handle of the sword.

「Just write something at least!! 」

Inexistent treatment...! This one was the hardest...!

Even the one that said “Dead” about John Dae was better than mine, which was blank, nothing at all, just air. However, I noticed that John Dae was staring at Seiya with wrinkles between his eyebrows.

「We have three swords. Then, together with the hero’s own sword...yo...you probably took four hundred strings of my hair...」

「No. I’ve pulled out more than six hundred strings of hair. 」

「AH!? Why did you take so much of my hair!? 」

「I needed a spare for my sword, and another spare. 」

「Do you really need that many!? 」

「I do. I actually used a lot of swords during the battle against the Grand Lion. 」

「Ugh! 」

John Dae gritted his teeth in rage because of Seiya’s annoying remarks. Regardless of that, Seiya looked at the horizon and proclaimed the following sentence.

「I’m going to Nephitet’s place after lunch. This time, I’ll learn everything about the Ghostbuster and finish this training for once and for all.」

—

After lunch, everyone went to the Graveyard of Gods.

Nephitet spoke with Seiya after he held his Killer Sword.

「It’s like giving your sword a part of your own spirit. You must feel as if your sword has become an extension of your arm.」

While holding the sword, Seiya closed his eyes, inhaled, and exhaled repeatedly. Although Seiya didn’t move for a while, something relevant happened afterwards. When Seiya opened his eyes, his Killer Sword blade was covered with a thin layer of a white membrane.

「Ohh! 」 , John Dae and I shouted at the same time with amazement.

「I can see that you are a fast learner. That’s right. That’s the Ghostbuster. If you use it well, you’ll be able to inflict damage on any kind of ghost.」

「You did it, Seiya! 」

In addition to his natural talent, these results happened much faster than usual because of his diligence during the hard-spiritual training. Amazingly, he learnt the Ghostbuster immediately.

Seiya, who put the sword on his sheath, walked towards me.

Eh!! Wha...What!? Don't tell me that I'll get a celebratory hug!?

I was a bit nervous when I thought briefly about it...

bang

Seiya hit my head with his fist!

I tried to scream, 「Why did you do that!! 」 , but I noticed that my body fell on the ground. What!! He made me into a spirited body against my will once again!

But!! Wha...Wha...What was going on!? I became a spirited body just by being beaten up!?

「Hmm, I see. So, you also learnt the technique of turning your opponent into a spirited being without a mallet. You are really an excellent student.」

Nephitet was extremely impressed by Seiya's talents...Ehhhhh!? Did he train that hard for the purpose of learning this skill as well!? Yet, he used me once again as an experiment to test his skills!? What the hell was wrong with him!!

Anyways, I overlapped myself with my fallen body and I returned back to normality.

「Do...Don't turn me into a wandering spirit without my permission!! 」

I screamed at Seiya, but he stared closely at his hand.

「Yeah. Now the real problem is cleared as long as I find a suitable replacement. 」

「A suitable replacement? 」

John Dae asked Seiya about the meaning of his words.

「Uhhhhhhh!! *sobs* 」

Suddenly, John Dae began to shed some tears.

「Ehhhh!? What's wrong, John Dae!? 」

「Uhhh! I'm convinced now! This hero is a terrible man capable of beating others or plucking someone else's hair! Even so...」

John Dae continued to speak tearfully.

「You...You have been trying to change my undead body by returning my soul to an original human form, am I right!?」

「What!? Is...Is that true, Seiya!? 」

Kiriko hit her knees and spoke on behalf of Seiya after realizing something significant.

「Ah!! So, in other words, his "other case" was because of this reason!! 」

Was that the reason why he put John Dae's spirited body onto the Lista creepy doll yesterday!?
Summing up, while he practiced, he was thinking of curing John Dae from his undead state!! Seiya was a gentle person after all!!

We looked at Seiya with eyes full of admiration. Yet, Seiya stared at us as if he were seeing fools.

「What are you people talking about? 」

John Dae, who wiped his tears, touched Seiya's back with a happy grin on his face.

「Ahaha! I know, I know! You are that type of guy who's a "tsundere"! You can be tough and aggressive, but you can be amicable and lovable when you want to!」

John Dae tried to put his arm around Seiya's shoulder. Nevertheless, Seiya dispelled his arm instantly.

「Stop it. You have rotten dead smell. Stay away from me. 」

「C'mon, don't say it like that! Let's get along well from now on! Partner! 」

「...I said, don't get close to me. 」

Seiya hit John Dae with his powerful fist full of anger!

bang bang BANG

Seiya's earth magic burst violently! I heard a terrible sound, and the body of John Dae disappeared into the ground! He was buried to an extent that his figure could not be seen anymore!

「Mi...Mi...Mister Seiya!? 」

「Seiya!? You overdid it!! I can't even see John Dae's forehead!! He is completely buried in the ground!!」

Kiriko and I were extremely shocked. Yet, Nephitet laughed as she approached us. She picked up John Dae's Killer Sword named "Dead" and gave it to Seiya.

「You can pierce it in the ground. 」

「Yeah. You're right. 」

Seiya pierced the sword in the location where John Dae was buried. Somehow, it looked like John Dae's grave.

Seiya spoke with great fulfillment.

「In addition to mastering the Ghostbuster skill, I also succeeded in synthesizing the Killer Sword. Besides, I even managed to build the grave of a noisy person...」

And finally, Seiya touched his glossy hair like always.

「Perfectly Ready. 」

Nephitet raised her thumb at Seiya, while Kiriko remained speechless, and John Dae was buried in the ground. When I saw everything that unfolded right in front of my eyes, I began to doubt that Seiya's "other case" was not really for John Dae's sake.

Chapter 104: Sand Town

After digging John Dae out of the ground, I spoke with the Great Goddess Isister and got permission to open the portal to Aerith Continent, the land of the Death Emperor. However, Seiya didn't let me open the portal straightaway.

「I don't know where is the Death Emperor is in the Aerith Continent. Anyways, let's avoid the northern area near the Gastreid Continent where the Demon King lives. First, let's check the southern region to see its state.」

「Seiya. There seems to be a town called "Fulwaana" in the south. Would you like to open the portal directly to that town, so that we can gather some information first?」

「A town in a continent ruled by the Death Emperor? There's a high chance that that town is already full of undead and ghosts. It's dangerous to open the portal directly to that town so suddenly. Open the portal with a distance of 5000 meters south from there.」

「O...Okay. I understand. 」

Seiya was cautious as ever. But, I respected his decision since it could be dangerous for us all. Therefore, I opened the portal to an area far away from that town. Still, Seiya didn't dive through the portal and waited. He took something like a jar out of his bag.

「Hey, hero. What's that? 」

「It's a jar owned by Bardul, the Goddess of Gold. 」

Ah. Speaking of which, didn't Bardul throw salt at me from that particular jar when I was cursed by Ceremonic...!?

Seiya took some salt out of that jar and placed it at the bottom of the portal's entrance. When he finished doing that, he sprinkled salt on my head, and then, on John Dae and Kiriko's heads as well. John Dae frowned upon receiving a bath of salt, and a confused Kiriko asked Seiya the following question.

「Mi...Mister Seiya. Why did you do that to us? 」

「Salt has the effect of shooing away evil spirits. It's a ghost countermeasure, so I used it as a prevention measure. Salt also works well for slugs.」

Why slugs had anything to do with this...Anyways, I thought that this bizarre talk was just another one of Seiya's weird talks, so I ignored it completely.

Seiya finally reached the portal's door. After slowly opening the door, Seiya dived in and we followed him.

「Whoa...This land is full of sand...! 」

Kiriko spoke aloud when we arrived at the land from the portal. Just as Kiriko said, all I could see was a 360-degree area full of sand. In addition, the hot sun shined brightly above our heads. It looked as if we arrived in the middle of the desert. John Dae narrowed his eyes and gazed at the horizon.

「Is that the Fulwaana town? 」

The horizon was swaying like a mirage because of the heat, but I could see something that looked like a town in front of John Dae.

「I think so. Well, let's walk over there for the time being. 」

「...Wait. Lista. 」

Seiya stopped me from trying to go to the Fulwaana town. Then, Seiya crouched down and put his hands on the hot sand.

「What are you doing, Seiya...Eh, ahhhh!? 」

On this precise moment, a golem appeared from the sand! After one golem, I saw that two more, no, three more emerged from the sand...Seiya spoke after creating four golems.

「We are going to ride on the back of these golems. 」

The big hand of the golem grabbed my body and put me on its back. Similarly, John Dae and Kiriko were placed on the back of their respective golems by force.

「Seiya!? But, why!? 」

「This land is a desert area. There may be monsters that try to drag you into the hot sand like small ants. It will be safer if we ride on the huge golems' backs. Besides...」

「Besides what? 」

When John Dae asked what he wanted to say, Seiya looked somewhat confident.

「...Isn't it fun? 」

「No...Absolutely not! This isn't fun at all...! 」

John Dae was right!! What was fun about this!? I didn't know how the sensitivity of this hero worked at all...!!

Still, Kiriko spoke with a bright voice.

「I think that this is extremely fun! 」

Is...Is that so!? I wondered if it felt like riding on the back of an elephant!?

「All right. Let's go now. 」

And then, we...no, actually, the golems with us on their backs began to move forward. However, when we walked a few steps closer to the town, the sand in front of us rose up, and a few human-like bones appeared from the ground!

「Wha...What on earth!? 」

A skeleton with a sword emerged from the sand! Before long, there were nearly ten skeleton swordsmen in front of us!

「He...Hey, hero! That's a horde of skeletons!! Should we get down from the golems to fight them!?!」

「That's not necessary. Let's leave this to the golems. 」

The skeletons swung their swords and ran towards us with cracking noises as if their bones were breaking apart. However, they flew away and broke into pieces when the golems' intense fists smashed into their heads.

As...As expected of Seiya's powerful golems since they were created after Seiya mastered the properties of earth magic! They had a tremendous offensive power!

While riding the golem, Seiya began to seize the immobilized skeletons and cleaned that wreckage with the power of the "Endless Fall". Nonetheless, Seiya stopped removing the wreckage from the sand, and stared fixedly at one of the immobilized skeletons. Compared to the other severely damaged skeletons, this one only had a broken head while the body remained intact.

「John Dae. Do you want to try to make this skeleton your new body? 」

「No...No, I don't. It doesn't make sense to change from an undead to a headless skeleton. I refuse it...」

「But, the smell of death will disappear, you know? 」

「I just told you that I don't want to be a "skeleton of an unknown person"! My current body is better even if it rots!」

「Oh my. You're very picky. What a luxurious guy you are. 」

「How am I a luxurious guy!? 」

John Dae refused to become a headless skeleton...We...Well, obviously. I mean, well, if one thought deeply about it, transferring John Dae's soul to a different body was complicated. After all, he won't be able to borrow a living human body, and the other choices were scarce. I wondered if there was no other option but to transfer his soul to a monster's body?

Either way, after we wiped out the skeleton swordsmen, we started heading towards Fulwaana once again. Still, our peaceful journey only lasted for a brief moment. This time, a large haze comprised of red mysterious beings appeared in front of us! Those things didn't have any physical substance, so that meant that those monsters were...

「Seiya! Those are ghosts! They're so many! 」

I noticed that shadows of people's faces were floating in that haze. It seemed as if those people were full of resentment. Apparently, the grudge of dead humans had become monsters with the power of the Demon King.

「Oh, so those things are ghosts? Now is the time to show the results of my training. 」

Then, Seiya held his Killer Sword and activated the Ghostbuster taught by Nephitet. Seiya held his sword with a white membrane while he rode the golem and charged against the ghostly haze!

「You too get out the Killer Swords from your waist. 」

「Ye...Yes! 」

We pulled the Killer Swords from the sheath that Seiya gave it to us. When I took my sword, I noticed that my blade had the same white membrane like Seiya's sword.

「Eh!? My sword already activated the Ghostbuster!? 」

「I gave my spiritual power to those swords when we were in the heavenly world. I'm going to let you guys help me this time.」

Unusually, Seiya was asking us to cooperate with him! I've always wanted to help Seiya, but this was a battle and my hands began to tremble persistently!

I...I was going to fight as well! I wondered if I could do it...No, what was I thinking about! The goddess had to support her hero! I had to do my best as well!

I imitated John Dae's movements and held my sword upwards. Then, Seiya stared at us with cold eyes.

「What are you going? Just give your swords to the golems. 」

「Ehh!! Give our swords to the golems!? 」

Both John Dae and I were surprised. Nevertheless, we gave our swords to the golems as instructed. The golems, who received the swords with the hidden spiritual power, assaulted the ghosts! They swung their arms as if they were large branches of trees falling and they slashed the large amount of dark haze! Once the ghosts took the hit from the Ghostbuster...

「Ohhhhhhhh... 」

The red cloud disappeared like a morning fog with excruciating voices of mourning.

...After that, the golems played an active part by manipulating the Ghostbuster against the enemy, even with us on their backs. Thanks to the golems, the number of ghosts were steadily decreasing, but John Dae had a difficult expression on his face.

「You're leaving everything to the golems...I wonder how you do it. Don't you have any sense of "feeling defeated" by relying on extra powers and not on your own directly...?」

「What does that mean "feeling defeated"? I don't need to feel such a useless thing. Safety is my number one priority.」

「Well, you're right about that part, but... 」

Ah...Mash was like that too. Most men just wanted to fight against monsters on direct battles.

However, I noticed that Seiya wrinkled between his eyebrows when he stared at one particular direction.

「...Hey, Kiriko. What are you doing? 」

I was surprised when I looked at Kiriko. It seemed that Kiriko didn't give her Killer Sword to the golem. Instead, she dwelled the Killer Sword with her trembling hands.

「I...I...I want to fight these ghosts with my own power! 」

「Kiri!? 」

She...She shouldn't be saying something like that to Seiya!! There was a reason why Seiya successfully overcame these obstacles without much difficulty!! So, it would be better if all of us followed his strict instructions....!!

Seiya spoke while staring fixedly at Kiriko.

「Do you want to test your own power that much? 」

「Yes! I want to become stronger! 」

Then, a brief silence. I was worried that Seiya would hit Kiriko with his fist, however...

「All right. If you want that much, then try it. But, don't get down from the golem until I say it's safe, do you understand?」

「I understand! 」

Wha...What!? Kiriko got Seiya's approval!? Somehow, this was a little bit odd since Seiya never acted this way towards anybody!!

Surprisingly, Seiya seemed to accept Kiriko's opinion...

「...Astral Break. 」

Seiya invoked Valkyrie's destructive technique that was effective against ghostly beings. He wrapped a ghost with a chain that came out of his hand. Seiya said the following words after seizing the ghost...

「Okay, Kiriko. Try attacking this ghost. 」

「Yes! 」

So...So overprotective!! We...Well, I was fine with that though!!

Kiriko descended from the golem, and approached the ghost bounded by chains. Yet, Kiriko didn't move and just trembled in front of the ghost.

「What's wrong, Kiri? All you have to do is slash it with your sword. 」

「You...You know...what if this ghost was originally a human being as well... 」

The friendly Killing Machine was hesitant to attack the seized ghost. As Seiya exhaled a small sigh, he slayed the ghost himself that was captured by the Astral Break.

「Ah... 」

「If you can't fight them, then you should've given your sword to the golem from the very beginning.」

「I...I'm sorry. 」

「Kiri! Don't force yourself! You just need to get used to battles! 」

John Dae tried to comfort a depressed Kiriko.

「New ghosts have appeared again!! They're more than before!! 」

Before long, dozens of ghosts charged against us from both the left and right sides!

The...They were certainly too many!! Were we going to be okay!?

Then, Seiya held his hand in front of his face.

「Job Change. From Earth Magic Warrior to Fire Magic Warrior. 」

Seiya moved his hands towards the horde of ghosts that approached us rapidly.

「Maximum Inferno. 」

In a moment, Seiya's hands projected scorching flames that divided in different directions and attacked the relentless ghosts! Those ghosts were wrapped in crimson flames...

「Ahhhhhhhh...! 」

After the ghosts cried aloud, they disappeared entirely.

「...So, your flame magic does work after all!! The Ghostbuster wasn't even needed! 」

「There may arise some opportunities to use it in the future. And if I can defeat them without using the Ghostbuster, then that's a good thing, don't you agree?」

「Yo...You're right, but...I feel that you've trained so hard for nothing, at least for now. 」

「Ghosts don't have a physical body, so I can't finish them off with Endless Fall. So, I have to burn them down.」

There was a huge horde of ghosts not too long. But, after Seiya finished them off and they disappeared, he began to use his flames in a random space with nothing except sand.

「What the hell is he doing...! 」

John Dae and I stared at Seiya with perplexed eyes, after he poured salt on the scorched land from Bardul's jar. After a while, we finally resumed our path towards the sand town.

After walking on the golems for a while, the whole scenery of the Fulwaana town finally came into view.

「Seiya! We're almost arriving at Fulwaana! 」

On this moment, something happened on our way to the town.

「Ahhh!? 」

There was a sudden gust of wind. The sand got into my eyes, and I closed my eyelids instantly. I heard John Dae's voice next to me, 「Ugh! 」 .

「Hm...Hmmm... 」

I opened my eyelids while rubbing my eyes.

...What...?

Suddenly, I felt extremely uncomfortable. It seemed that the appearance of Fulwaana town, which I had been observing from far away, had changed slightly.

I thought that it were my mind that played tricks on me. However, Seiya thought otherwise and spited with his tongue.

「Be careful, Lista. There was a strange feeling with that gust of wind. 」

「Ah! Seiya, did you feel that too? 」

「Maybe we've entered the Death Emperor's territory. Don't lose your vigilance. 」

「Ye...Yes! 」

Both John Dae and Kiriko hardened their faces. We felt nervous as we headed towards the entrance of Fulwaana town.

At the entrance stood a woman in a traditional costume who hid her head in order to avoid the wind and sand. She uncovered her face when she noticed our presence. It was a beautiful woman with a suntanned skin.

The woman had a suspicious look, maybe because we rode on top the golems. But, as soon as she noticed Seiya, she received us with a bright smile on her face.

「Lord Seiya!! 」

She shouted aloud and rushed towards Seiya's golem. Seiya pulled out his sword.

「Who the hell are you? Don't get close to me. 」

「Ehh! Have you forgotten? I'm Millie, Gerstein's wife. 」

「I don't know any Millie or Gerstein. 」

「It can't be...! 」

The woman named Millie was confused. Perhaps, was this person acquainted with Seiya from one year ago!?

「Excuse me! Seiya has memory loss! 」

Then, that woman softened her expression and laughed a little bit.

「Is...Is that so. But, when I met you the other day, you seemed to be fine... 」

Hmm? I thought it were one year ago, but it was "the other day" instead?

I was confused about it, but John Dae and Kiriko were smiling when they looked at the houses of Fulwaana that were smeared with dirt of the desert.

「This town is still safe! 」

「It seems that the Death Emperor has not arrived here yet! 」

Then, Millie showed a puzzling complexion when she heard our talk.

「“Death Emperor”? What’s that? 」

「What!? Don’t you know anything about it!? 」

...She didn’t know the name of the Emperor that reigned over this continent!?

We looked somewhat confused, but Millie said with a smile.

「Lord Seiya defeated the Demon King Artemaeus, and for the past year, this land has been peaceful.」

Chapter 105: Another One

「Seiya defeated the Demon King!? 」

I was stunned by Millie's words.

Wa...Wait a moment!! What was this person talking about!? If Seiya defeated the Demon King from one year ago, then Exfolia wouldn't have been destroyed and we wouldn't have come here in order to save it!!

「I thought that Lord Seiya had brought the pottery materials that Cleo had requested. 」

「Cleo? Pottery, you say? 」

「Cleo is my and Gerstein's son. My husband, Gerstein, runs an inn in this town, and when Lord Seiya came from Tarmine about half a month ago, Cleo asked for the soil of a different continent. If one mixes Radral's soil with this continent's soil, one will get a nicely produced clay.」

「Ah, yeah... 」

I didn't understand what Millie was saying. How did she ask Seiya for pottery materials half a month ago? Seiya had been traveling with me ever since we came to Exfolia. It was impossible to believe in such a thing.

I wondered if this strange woman was in her right mind...When I thought about it, Seiya pulled my neck aggressively and I got away from Millie involuntarily!

「Ugh!? Why did you do that so suddenly!? 」

「Lista. Try to see if you can open the portal. 」

「Right now!? 」

「Just try it now. 」

I reluctantly cast a spell and summoned the portal. But, when I opened the door, there was a white wall in the inside!

...Thi...This was...the effect of the Cursed Sphere!!

Seiya nodded positively after realizing our current situation.

「Okay. That proves that this town is already under the influence of the Death Emperor.」

「If that's true, then maybe...the people of this town are...! 」

I stared at Millie and the town's people that walked freely on the streets. Si...Since it was the Death Emperor we were talking about...This was probably the "Town of the Dead"!?

I freaked out. I also noticed that Seiya wrinkled his eyebrows.

「How easy it was for us to jump into the enemy's trap. I already used earth snakes to check the current situation of Fulwaana. But, they haven't found any monsters. They'll keep doing surveillance to see if they can detect any abnormalities. If they feel something is strange, they will report to me immediately.」

「We...Well, I don't think we would've guessed that this town was like this...! 」

Seiya regretted for entering Fulwaana's town. Meanwhile, John Dae and Kiriko stared at the surroundings with great suspicion and confusion.

「This scenario is quite strange. It's hard to believe there is such a peaceful town in Exfolia.」

「If you think about it, there were a lot of skeletons and ghosts outside of this town. And yet, this town is strangely safe...」

Seiya nodded silently.

「It's obvious that the people of this town are strange and suspicious. The real problem is the truth behind this oddness. For example, "the gathering of the dead"; "effects of illusion"; "demon transformations"; "clay dolls"...There are too many possibilities. We'll have to crush them one by one.」

「Crush, you say? 」

Seiya approached Millie. While walking, Seiya took something like gloves out of his pocket and wore them on his hands. Then, he put his hands on Millie's neck and slowly went down to her chest...Seiya opened up her upper garment! Millie's chest became exposed for everybody to see!

「Se...Seiya!? 」

I was shocked by the sudden sexual harassment! Seiya looked around Millie's whole body, including her breasts, waist, arms and legs! Millie's face was fully red!

「Ah, Lord Seiya!? No, that place is...Ah, ah! 」

「Seiya!! What are you doing... 」

Next, Seiya sprinkled holy water on the face of the suntanned Millie!

「Agh!? 」

「Stop it right there, you damned perverted hero!! 」

I screamed like a mad woman and jumped between Seiya and Millie. I bowed my head to her in apology.

「I'm truly sorry about this, Miss Millie!! 」

Millie's body was shaking without stopping. He touched her whole body and, on top of that, he even poured holy water on her face...This was the ultimate sexual harassment! He overdid it just to find out if this person was dead or not!

However, Millie was showing a satisfactory expression on her face.

「Ah no. It's okay. It's really...okay. My husband doesn't do anything like this to me...」

「Miss Millie!? Don't tell me that you're having sexual excitement!? 」

The married woman wasn't angry. Instead, she felt sexual excitement towards Seiya.

Wha...What the hell was this!! So, sexual harassment was allowed because Seiya was a handsome man!? If it were John Dae, I bet that it would be quite scandalous!!

While I complaint about the absurdity of this situation, Seiya stepped away from Millie and declared the following words.

「I also checked her status. This woman is not a corpse, a monster or a doll, but a real human being.」

John Dae stared fixedly at the town's people with his narrowed eyes.

「The other people don't seem to be undead. I can't explain it how, but I can feel it that they're not like me.」

John Dae understood the signs that represented the undead. Speaking of which, my goddess' intuition didn't alert me about these people. I didn't feel any evil aura coming from Millie nor the town's people. It didn't feel as if they were a hidden menace.

「If so, then what is this town...eh...? 」

I didn't even finish my sentence after I saw Seiya's behavior. I was astonished at what I witnessed. Without hesitation, Seiya pierced the back of his hand with his Killer Sword! The sword cut his flesh and red blood fell to the ground!

「Wha...Wha...What are you doing!? 」

「I tried to inflict severe pain on my body. But, there is no change. I don't think we are inside of an illusion.」

So, he tried to feel pain in order to wake up in case he was inside of an enemy's illusion!?

「Well, it's hard to think that I fell inside of an illusion before realizing it. But, I did it just to be certain...Hey, Lista. Cure my wound right now.」

「Okay, I understand!! 」

Even though he was overly cautious, this kind of unreasonableness was extremely out of this world! What was wrong this person's brain!

Seiya muttered when I began to cure his wound with my healing magic.

「In other words, the most credible situation right now is that the "people of this town are currently alive but are being manipulated by the enemy through a process of hypnosis."」

After I managed to close Seiya's open wound, Seiya pressed the medicinal herbs on the back of his hand.

「Anyway, this town is suspicious. I want to get out of here as soon as possible... 」

「But, hero! If that is true, then it means that we've managed to find a town with living breathing human beings, am I wrong?」

「The...Then, that means that these people will be in danger once we leave! 」

「That's right! You must protect them or the Death Emperor will kill them! 」

When we all gazed together at Seiya, he took a deep breath.

「It can't helped. We'll stay here for a while and see how it goes. Besides, I don't think it's a good idea to get of this town straightaway.」

「Eh... 」

Seiya looked up at the sky of Fulwaana. The sky above the town was clear, but a poisonous black cloud floated outside of the town. Rather, I felt as if the town was immune to the darkish haze that crawled in the outside.

「We're going to explore this town with utmost vigilance. Don't leave my side. 」

Seiya began to walk. When we tried to follow him to the streets of Fulwaana, Millie called us.

「Ex...Excuse me, our inn is just across the street. As always, we won't charge you for a room, so please stop by later if you'd like to...」

—

Fulwaana was a town in the desert. Therefore, the ground beneath our feet was not paved. The streets were lined with tents, and the goods were placed on the ground like bazaars.

「Lord Hero! Greetings! 」

「Good morning, Lord Seiya! 」

「Thank you for visiting us all the way here from Tarmine! 」

The people of Fulwaana spoke to Seiya as we passed through the streets. Everybody seemed to know him. Unlike the hatred gaze and the bad treatment that Seiya received from the people in Exfolia so far, in this particular town, Seiya was received with respect and admiration. That's right...Everybody here believed that Seiya defeated the Demon King a year ago...

「Oh! How rare! There's a weapon's shop here! 」

John Dae pointed to a tent. Saber-like swords were lined up in the ground. As John Dae described, weaponry shops in Exfolia were certainly rare. The Demon King conquered Exfolia. So, it was never possible for us to find a weaponry shop and buy a proper weapon.

Seiya also seemed suspicious about it and approached the weaponry shop slowly. However, after looking at the swords for a while, he whispered as if he were looking at something boring.

「They are weak weapons. 」

I activated my Appraisal skill. I saw that the attack power didn't surpass the power of the Killer Sword, and of course, it was also subpar with the power of the Platinum Sword. I heard that the difficulty rank of Exfolia before the Demon King received protection from the evil god was classified as "B". If that's true, then the weapons of this world were not strong to being with.

「In the first place, they're weapons sold by humans manipulated by a monster. There's no reason they should be strong. To be honest, I don't even know if these swords are really swords.」

「Eh? But, they look like average swords, don't they? 」

「I've read a picture book in the past where a tanuki* transformed as a traveler. Even if the people of this town are not illusions, what they sell may be illusions. There is a high chance that one of those swords may transform into a dumpling after we buy it.」

「Yeah, you're right. 」

Seiya was always paranoid and suspected everything. But, this time, I agreed with him. There wasn't anything particularly great to buy at this weapon shop.

However, as soon as Seiya tried to walk out, he stopped abruptly as if he saw an incredible sight.

Seiya took out a bag of money from his pocket. Then, he talked to the shop owner who wore a turban.

「I want that sword. Give me 100 units. 」

「You...You're going to buy them in the end!? Didn't you say that they could be illusionary traps!？」

「I thought that the scenario where a sword transforms into a dumpling was of a very low probability. So, I decided to purchase it for the time being.」

「Besides, you don't need to buy 100 units of that sword!! What are you going to do if they all end up as dumplings!？」

「Even if they all end up as dumplings, they may be useful later on. 」

The shop owner, who had been silently staring at us, spoke aloud with a perplexed reaction.

「I don't sell or make any dumplings!! 」

—

...Anyways, 100 swords were too much. So, Seiya ended up buying 10 swords that could transform into dumplings...After buying those ten swords, Seiya stopped by at the tool tent shop. There were medicinal herbs, poisonous herbs, and other kinds of herbs that were effective against paralysis.

「Hey. Tanuki old man. 」

「Are...Are you referring to me? 」

「That's correct. These herbs have no effect at all, aren't they just leaves? 」

「These herbs are extremely effective!! That's rude, really!! 」

「Hmm. I doubt it. Still, I'll buy your "mere leaves"...Give me all you've got. 」

Seiya spoke messed up lines once again. Seiya ended up buying all of the herbs available in that tool tent shop.

「You...You ended up buying everything you said was useless...! 」

「Yeah. I don't want to regret it later, so I bought what I wanted. 」

The sun began to set after we finished shopping. After walking with a lot of luggage in the streets, I saw a large house at the end of the road. It was the largest house I've seen in this town. That was probably the inn managed by Millie's husband. A boy, who I hadn't seen before, was standing at the side of the house.

「Ah, Lord Seiya!! 」

The boy came running to us when he saw our presence. He showed such a happy face when he approached Seiya.

「Did you bring me the pottery materials? 」

「Who the hell are you? I haven't brought you anything. 」

「Ehh!? Then, what you have on your big bag aren't my pottery materials!? 」

「This is just a bag with a "bunch of leaves". 」

「Why do you have so many!? 」

Millie and a man came out of that large house when they heard the noise. A man on his forties bowed his head when he approached Seiya. This man was probably Millie's husband, Gerstein.

「I...I apologize, Lord Seiya! C'mon Cleo, behave yourself! 」

「But, Lord Seiya didn't bring me the pottery materials as he promised! 」

「Lord Seiya seemed to have lost his memory! 」

「Ehh...!? What!? 」

Cleo sighed with disappointment. Apparently, Gerstein heard the situation from Millie. With gentle faces, this man and Millie pointed to their inn with both hands.

「Everyone must be tired. The sun is setting, so please come inside. We will prepare you the best room as usual.」

Gerstein tried to guide us to his inn. Yet, Seiya shook his head.

「I refuse. Who on his right mind would go to your devil's den? 」

「De...Devil's den!? No way...!! 」

The inn that Gerstein managed himself was described as a "Devil's den" by Seiya. After leaving Gerstein speechless, Seiya proceeded to a vacant space in a remote area.

「All right. Let's stay here. 」

Then, Seiya touched the ground. Suddenly, the ground rose in no time, and a large cave that was as big as the previous inn appeared!

「Wha...What...! 」

The Gerstein couple was in shock when Seiya created several golems and earth snakes with earth magic. Seiya placed his creations around the cave. Then, he stared at Gerstein with sharp eyes.

「You're called Gerstein, correct? If you're going to attack us in our sleep, then be prepared. Because these monsters will attack you with all their might.」

「My...My dad would never do something like that!! 」

Cleo screamed at Seiya. And then, the young boy said with an angry and sad face.

「Ahhh. I don't have the materials for my pottery, and Lord Seiya is out of his mind. This is the worst...」

This time, Millie was the one who scolded Cleo.

「Cleo! Watch your tongue! He is the hero who saved our world! 」

「Bu...But, this person...Is he really Lord Seiya!? His eyes are unfriendly and his attitude is bad!! Maybe he's a fake!!」

Cleo stared at Seiya with distrust. Likewise, Seiya stared at Cleo with suspicion. Sto...Stop it, Seiya!! How could he "fight" with children!?

「This person is different. The Lord Seiya I know doesn't behave like this... 」

Cleo looked fixedly at Seiya with an irritated red-face. Then, suddenly, Cleo moved his gaze away from Seiya and stared at the end of the street.

...Ahead of young Cleo's eyes. There was a man walking towards us with the sunset on his back. My heartbeat increased when I looked at that man.

This man didn't wear any armor. Instead, he wore a nobleman's outfit with the emblem of the Tarmine Kingdom. However, there was no doubt about the identity of this man that had a glossy black hair.

...Im...Impossible!! What on earth...!!

Cleo exclaimed happily.

「See!! I knew it!! The real Lord Seiya has finally come!! 」

Another Seiya came in our direction with a full smile on his face.

Chapter 106: A Parallel World

Important Translator Note:

For this chapter, we decided to use the name "our Seiya" to distinguish from the "fake Seiya" in order to make it easier for the readers to distinguish which Seiya is which.

Cleo spoke with great excitement. While, John Dae, Kiriko and I were all astonished.

「I knew it! This Lord Seiya is a fake! 」

「Wha...What are you talking about! This person isn't a fake! 」

I shouted at Cleo. However, he approached us with an angry face. Then, before we noticed, he grabbed Kiriko's hood and removed it from her face.

「Ah... 」

Kiriko was taken by surprise. Before she knew it, her head was already exposed. Cleo pointed to Kiriko and John Dae with a trembling hand.

「Ju...Just look! It's a machine and a zombie! This is a proof that they're bad people since Lord Seiya would never have monster friends!」

Cleo tried to convince his parents, Gerstein and Millie. This fact was indeed, suspicious. They could suspect that our Seiya was a fake. Still, I pretended to be calm and spoke with Cleo.

「...Cleo. Calm down and look closely at me. 」

「Wha...What do you want? 」

I slowly touched my golden hair and made an exquisite pose.

「Don't you feel an aura of divine light? That's right, I am a goddess. My name is Listarte. And this person is named Seiya, the hero who will save this world.」

Yet, Cleo stared fixedly at me with a disgusting look on his face.

「Along with the monsters, that fake man even brought a demented woman with him!!!」

「You fucking brat!! 」

「Ugh!? Not only her head, but her tongue is also vulgar!! 」

Cleo hid behind the actual fake smiling Seiya. I spoke impatiently then.

「A...Anyway! It's dangerous, you know! Get away from him! I'm 100% certain that that person is a monster! Isn't that right, Seiya?」

I tried to confirm it with our Seiya. Yet, our Seiya just stared at the fake smiling Seiya.

「Lista. Look at his stats. 」

「Eh... 」

After being told, I activated my clairvoyance ability to see the status of Seiya's impersonator.

Ryuguuin Seiya

Level – 36

HP – 70024

MP – 12077

Attack – 48651

Defense – 47999

Agility – 42187

Magic – 9685

Potential – 475

Resistance – Fire, Ice, Wind, Water, Lightening, Earth, Poison, Paralysis, Sleep, Curse, Instant Death, Abnormal Condition

Special skills – Fire magic (Lv 10), Burst Magic (Lv 4), Magic Sword (Lv 4), Acquired experience value increase (Lv 8), Ability perception (Lv 7), Synthesis (Lv 3)

Skills – Hell's Fire, Maximum Inferno, Phoenix Drive, Phoenix Thrust, Drain Charge Move

Personality – Unbelievably Reckless

He really had similar stats of our Seiya...Wait, his personality! It says, "Unbelievably Reckless"! Weren't this Seiya's stats before he became unbelievably cautious?

「How far-fetched! He has fake stats as well! 」

The perfect Seiya's impersonator impressed me. Still, the fake smiling Seiya, but with strange deep eyes, gave a bag to Cleo.

「Cleo. It's the promised materials for your pottery. 」

「Thank you! Lord Seiya! 」

His voice was just like Seiya's voice. Millie and Gerstein were as surprised as I was when all of us stared the two Seiyas alternately.

「There are two Lord Seiyas!! Wha...What's going on!? 」

Cleo pointed to our Seiya while hiding behind the back of the fake Seiya.

「I told you that one is a fake! Lord Seiya! Defeat him! 」

Then, the impersonator finally stared at our Seiya.

「Yeah. He certainly looks like me. 」

And then...He slowly approached our Seiya!

「Whoa! 」

I hid behind our Seiya immediately. The impersonator asked the following question.

「What is your name? 」

「...Ryuguuin Seiya. 」

「Oh. We're not just similar, we also have the same names. 」

When I watched him closely to see what kind of reaction he was going to make, the fake Seiya began to laugh.

「Ahah. What a great coincidence. Ahahah. 」

No, wait a moment, how could he believe that this was just a mere coincidence!? What was wrong with that fella!?

「I don't identify you as a stranger. Let's get along well. 」

While the fake Seiya laughed happily, he reached out his hand to shake hands with our Seiya. Yet, Cleo broke between them.

「Lord Seiya!! These are absolutely bad guys!! Defeat them!! 」

That should be our line in the first place. Even so, the fake Seiya shook his head quietly.

「No, Cleo. I don't think these people are bad guys. For example, this young woman is...probably a goddess like Aria, the goddess that supported me one year ago.」

「Hey, yo...you!! Do you even know who Aria is!? 」

「But, Lord Seiya!! Even if that woman is a goddess, the other two are real monsters!! 」

「Yeah. One is a zombie while the other is a Killing Machine. 」

Cleo wrinkled between his eyebrows and pointed furiously at Kiriko.

「Just look at that machine's body! I have a very disgusting feeling just by looking at that monster!」

「Uhhh...! 」

A sad Kiriko lowered her head. Then, the fake Seiya turned his harsh eyes on Cleo.

「Don't judge everything by appearance. I can indeed see that both of them are monsters, but I don't feel any evil aura coming from them.」

「Bu...But, it's weird to have a zombie and a machine as friends. 」

「Cleo. Apologize to that Killing Machine. 」

The fake Seiya demanded Cleo to apologize. Then, after he hesitated for a moment, Cleo finally bowed to Kiriko in apology.

「I am...sorry... 」

「Ah, don't! I wasn't bothered by it, so don't worry! 」

The fake Seiya was smiling with satisfaction after looking at both Cleo and Kiriko. Wha...What was this weird atmosphere...

When we first came to Exfolia, Seiya temporarily lost his memory because of the werewolf beast man. Somehow, this fake smiling Seiya reminded me of Seiya during that time...Uh, no! I mustn't be fooled! This must be the Death Emperor's trap in order to trick us!

Then, suddenly, the fake Seiya changed his gaze and stared fixedly at me. He approached me then.

「Wha...What do you want! 」

「Lady Goddess. Why did you come to this town? 」

「To save Exfolia from getting destroyed by the Demon King! 」

「That's strange. Exfolia has already been saved. I defeated the Demon King Artemaeus one year ago.」

「You defeated him!? That's not true!! Artemaeus had two lives!! Your party defeated the first life of the Demon King, however, he resurrected with this second life without you knowing and counterattacked you!! You ended up dy...dying in the end...」

The fake Seiya had a very surprised expression on his face upon hearing my words.

「As expected of an almighty goddess. You know the information that only I know off. That's right. Certainly, in the final battle, the Demon King, who I thought had died, was resurrected by using his second life. However...I knew that information beforehand when I went to the Sage Village.」

「Did...Did you really go to the Sage Village!? 」

The Great Goddess Isister showed me through the crystal ball that Seiya didn't go to the Sage Village because he wanted to save the people of Exfolia the fastest way possible. That's why he ended up going to the battle against the Demon King without learning the secret of the enemy's two lives on the Sage Village.

「The day before, I saw Tiana crying, so I had a "bad feeling" about the upcoming battle with the Demon King. Therefore, I changed my schedule and ended up going to the Sage Village instead. I did well by listening to Tiana's advice. If I didn't go, my party would've been completely defeated. After the Demon King revived, I managed to prevent his attack on Colt and I defeated him by using the technique I learnt from the Sage Village.」

「Lies!! It's all lies!! 」

「It's not lies. 」

I froze when the fake Seiya looked at me with serious eyes. I felt as if a ghost told me a ghost story. Before long, the sun went down and our surroundings got dark. Then, the fake Seiya suggested the following idea.

「Lady Goddess. The sun has gone down. Would you like to continue this talk after we go to the inn?」

After saying that, the fake smiling Seiya pointed to Gerstein's inn. Nonetheless, the real Seiya shook his head with a tough face.

「No. Let's continue tomorrow morning. We're going to rest in the cave. 」

「Se...Seiya!? 」

Our Seiya proceeded to walk away and went inside the cave that he created earlier on.

—

We parted ways with Gerstein and the others, and we dived into the cave protected by a horde of golems. We entered a large space illuminated with magical stones. I spoke aloud the feelings I had with our Seiya, John Dae and Kiriko.

「What a crazy thing that just happened!! How was that even possible!?!」

However, our Seiya remained silent, as he leaned against the mud wall with his arms crossed. Instead, John Dae was the one who opened his mouth.

「Simply put, I think that hero is very suspicious. Isn't the Death Emperor capable of creating different haunting forms?」

「You...You're right! That's the only answer I could think of! 」

Yet, Kiriko murmured as if she thought otherwise.

「I...I don't feel that the other Mister Seiya is lying. 」

「Ehh? Kiri! Why do you think that? 」

「So...Somehow, I can feel it...I can't explain it... 」

Our Seiya, who was silent until now, spoke with a lower tone.

「Certainly, that guy isn't lying. I saw that he was "not impersonating me" with my perspective and Appraisal skills.」

「Bu...But, you won't be able to know that for sure if that person is able to use the skill of the art of change!」

「Of course, there's also that possibility. However, I mastered the art of change from Rusti in the heavenly world. If he changed his appearance in a way that even I can't detect, then he reached a much higher level than Rusti's powers.」

An art of change much more powerful than the powers of the Goddess of Change!? Tha...That was impossible, or was it not...!?

「I always consider every scenario. And I've been thinking of a possible hypothesis.」

Our Seiya continued to speak after a brief silence.

「If what he said is true, and this town believes that I saved the world by defeating the Demon King Artemaeus one year ago, then...In other words, this town "embodies the parallel world after I defeated the Demon King successfully".」

「Un...Unbelievable...! 」

John Dae couldn't even believe it, but...I also didn't want to believe on that absurdity as well! A part of the world that was separated from the world that we lived in...Was that even possible in the first place!? That was a whole different level than the powers of our supreme god, the God of Creation!! Did this happen because of the combination between the powers of the Death Emperor and the powers of the evil god!?

「It's just a hypothesis. There's still a high chance that the Death Emperor deceived us and skillfully disguised himself among those people.」

Kiriko asked our Seiya while John Dae and I remained silent.

「Assuming that this is a different world from ours, why would the Death Emperor invite us to such a place? Besides, why would he create this town in the first place?」

「We don't know anything at the moment. I used the earth snakes to investigate the people of this town. But, there was no sign of the Death Emperor nor any kind of monsters lurking around. I also thought that maybe something changed elsewhere, so I checked the earth snake cameras installed in Tarmine and Galvano. However, there was no abnormality so far.

「I don't understand what's going on!! What is the Death Emperor even planning!?!」

John Dae was perplexed by this occurrence. It was creepy that we didn't know the enemy's appearance nor did we know what was going on. Our speculations were just hypothesis. Everything was unknown. Still, our Seiya didn't lose his calm attitude as usual.

「I already created many golems and earth snakes for this town. Even so, keep your alert level to the maximum, and keep your eyes open to every possible enemy.」

Then, our Seiya laid his body on the ground.

「This may be a long battle. I have prepared a room to each of you on this cave. So, rest your body for now.」

I couldn't even understand what our Seiya was planning to do in this mysterious situation. Regardless of my innumerable questions, I headed obediently to my assigned room. And so, I spent the night in our Seiya's cave.

—

Early morning of the next day.

I couldn't sleep well. So, I went out of the room and looked at the outside from the cave entrance. Under the dark sky, the streets of Fulwaana were comprised of houses and tents made of soil.

...Was this town that different from the world that we lived in? Hmm. I couldn't believe it yet...

Before long, I noticed that Seiya stood next to me.

「Go...Good morning, Seiya. 」

「Yeah. 」

Then, he offered me a basket with bread.

「It's bread for breakfast. Share it with everyone. 」

「Thank you. 」

Oh my, somehow he was in a good mood today.

I received the basket with bread. Seiya narrowed his eyes and stared at the horizon. The sky above the outskirts of the town was rather cloudy.

「Look. That's a sandstorm. 」

「A sandstorm...I see. So, that's why the sky looks so cloudy. 」

「Yeah. That means that no one can't get out of Fulwaana for two or three days.」

「Yes, it seems so. 」

Then, my eyes looked at Seiya. Suddenly, I realized that the Seiya next to me wasn't wearing any armor!

「Ah, are you...perhaps...the fake Seiya!? 」

「I'm not a fake. Well, actually, I'm not the one that accompanies you, Lady Goddess.」

「What!! 」

I was so startled that I jumped backwards! Da...Dangerous!! What if he attacked me now!?

However, the fake Seiya noticed that I was frightened by his appearance and said the following words.

「Don't be afraid. Although everyone's opinions are different, I know that you're not evil people, so there isn't any problem, right?」

「No...No, actually, there are many problems going on right now...! 」

Wait a second!! This fake Seiya...Did he completely believe in our story!? This person really resembled the reckless Seiya that I met when we first came to Exfolia!!

Either way, it seemed that he wasn't going to harm me. At the same time I felt relieved, I noticed a crack in the soil under my feet and something raised from the ground!

「Ehh!? What's this!? 」

Our Seiya, who wore a familiar armor, emerged from the ground!

「Ho...How could you appear from the most bizarre places!? 」

「I was hiding in the ground. I thought that I had to be ready to strike my fake persona if he ended up attacking you...」

「I would never do something like that. 」

「Hmm. 」

Our Seiya approached the fake Seiya while taking off the dust from his body.

「Let me ask you one thing. You have a technique that I don't possess. "Drain Charge Move"...Is that a technique that you learnt at the Sage Village?」

「That's correct. It absorbs the opponent's power when defending against the opponent's attacks. Actually, you can't perform an offensive strike with this power straightaway. You have to fill up the force, so that you can perform a powerful counterattack combined with the force of the opponent's attack power.」

「So that was the reason why you defeated the resurrected Demon King.」

The fake Seiya stared fixedly our Seiya.

「Are you interested? I can teach you this technique if you'd like to. 」

「Is that so. Okay, I'll learn it just in case. 」

Ehh!? Seriously!?

I spoke immediately to our Seiya.

「Seiya, do you think it's okay to learn a new technique from an impersonator!?」

「Don't fret. I am always vigilant. And besides that, I'm accepting this with the purpose of exploring the unknown while having a dialogue with him.」

「Is...Is that so...! All right, but be careful...! 」

Both of them held their respective swords.

The fake Seiya instructed our Seiya to hold his sword in a particular posture. At first, it seemed like a normal practice...

「Work hard and concentrate as if you were trying your best in life.」

「Okay. 」

...Ah?

「Just try to imagine when you were at the bottom of the gymnastics' pyramid in elementary school.」

「Yeah. 」

「Relax and chew your enemy's attack as if you were chewing a gum.」

「I got it. 」

... No, this practice didn't make any sense at all!!

I thought that the fake Seiya didn't know how to teach. But, if I looked at that particular guidance, it felt as if it were the real Seiya instead. After a while, both John Dae and Kiriko emerged from the cave and gazed at the two Seiyas.

「Are...Are they practicing with swords? 」

「But...what a strange sight. 」

It was indeed a strange sight just as John Dae described. Seiya was teaching a sword skill to a fellow Seiya. The practice of two Seiyas continued endlessly.

—

...One hour later. I spoke with our Seiya and said, 「you have to take a break soon. 」 , nonetheless...

「*both voices* What? 」

The two of them turned around at the same time.

「Ah no, actually I was speaking to the Seiya standing over there. 」

「*both voices* Which one of us? 」

「Ahh, c'mon!! How annoying is this!! 」

I pointed to the Seiya wearing an armor.

「I spoke with the one that came here with me, the "cautious Seiya"! 」

Then, the fake Seiya began to laugh out loud.

「The cautious Seiya, you say. *keeps laughing* 」

「You are the “reckless Seiya”!! Got it!? 」

「Hmm. Why am I reckless?...Ah well, I don't care much about it though. Anyway, let's keep practicing.」

「I was trying to speak about that matter for a while now!! 」

I screamed at him. Yet, the fake Seiya just smiled innocently at me. When I saw the cheerful smile on the reckless Seiya that lacked on the cautious Seiya, my vigilance diminished a little.

Chapter 107: A Form of Love

Two hours had passed since then. The practice became serious and turned into a sort of a freak battle. The reckless Seiya kept screaming at the cautious Seiya to put more heart into the fighting poses.

In the midst of this intense practice, I noticed that Kiriko didn't stand next to John Dae.

「Hey, John Dae. Where's Kiri? 」

「Ah, Kiriko, you ask. Earlier, Cleo grabbed her hand and took her to his inn.」

「Wait a second! What did you say? You should've been looking after her, you know! Kiri is still a child!」

「You weren't even watching her as well! 」

I left the two Seiyas and headed towards the inn. I didn't feel that Cleo was dangerous, but I was worried that he could bully her for being a machine. After all, he implied that she was disgusting in yesterday's exchange.

I found Gerstein at the main counter of his inn. He told me that Cleo was at a tent behind his house.

I went to the backyard and opened the large entrance of the said tent.

「...Kiri, are you there? 」

「Ah, yes! I'm here! 」

When I entered the tent, I saw that Cleo and Kiriko were sitting side by side. Cleo was kneading some clay and his hands were full of mud. His mother, Millie, was also nearby, and the shelves behind them were lined up with various types of soil pottery.

「Eh? What are you doing? 」

「He's making pottery! 」

Kiriko spoke happily. Millie approached me and whispered in secret.

「Cleo was depressed by the events that happened yesterday. So, I told him to teach Miss Kiri how to make pottery.」

「Ah, is that so! 」

Instead of bullying, Cleo was getting along well with Kiriko. I see. I thought that he was a cheeky boy at first...But, he was an innocent child after all.

「Even so, why pottery? Is it a hobby for children around here? 」

Then, Millie smirked at my questions.

「The people of Fulwaana are grateful to the nature. We cherish everything that this earth gives to us...Therefore pottery making is a flourishing practice around here.」

Without using a potter's wheel, Cleo kneaded the clay with his hands and tried to make small pots. He showed his confidence to Kiriko when he finished.

「Just like this. Got it? Now you try it. 」

「Yes! 」

Kiriko received the clay from Cleo and tried to knead it. However, it seemed that her experience didn't go well. Cleo was somehow shocked.

「You're clumsy even though you are a machine... 」

「I...I'm sorry. 」

「Look. Just do it this way. 」

「Ah, I see! 」

...Hmm! Somehow, he looked like an older brother!

I felt like smiling when I saw Cleo holding Kiriko's hand to knead the clay. All right. Millie was also with them. I didn't see any problem nor threat.

Suddenly, I noticed a large plate of decorated pottery in the tent. On that large plate, there was a picture of warriors fighting against a scorpion-like monster.

「Excuse me, Millie. Are these people, perhaps... 」

「Yes. It's Lord Seiya's party. Seiya visited Fulwaana one year ago and defeated the monster "King Scorpion" that was devouring our land. That picture depicts what happened during that time. We engraved it on the pottery plate in order to remember it.」

Millie spoke with serious eyes.

「At that time, I was watching the battle of Lord Seiya up close. It was a fierce and intense battle between Lord Seiya's party and the King Scorpion. Lord Seiya managed to win the battle, even though his abdomen was stabbed by the King Scorpion's tail.」

「Ehh!! He was stabbed in the abdomen!? 」

「The other members of his party were also poisoned, paralyzed and sleep-deprived.」

「He...He really tried to challenge a strong opponent even though his level was lower!! This really sounded like something that a reckless Seiya would do!!」

I was amazed at the large gap between the reckless Seiya and the cautious Seiya. Yet, Millie laughed gently.

「Actually, looking at it now, that battle was probably too much for Lord Seiya's party. Even so, for us, the people of Fulwaana, Lord Seiya is a person we respect dearly. He is a hero that works hard in order to overcome obstacles that are stronger than his own power.」

「Yeah. Both of them are extreme on their very respective personalities. I think if we could add those two together and divide them in half, we'd probably get the reasonable Seiya...」

After talking to Millie, I decided to head back to our Seiya. I left Kiriko in the tent, because she looked passionate about making pottery.

—

In front of the inn, and much to my surprise, the two Seiyas were still exchanging swords.

「The...They're still practicing...! 」

「Yeah. They continued to practice without any breaks. Actually, the cautious one is all right, but the reckless one seems to have reached his limit. He's going to collapse.」

As John Dae described, the reckless Seiya was clearly fatigued. He was beyond his limit now. Before long, the reckless Seiya spoke after he realized that he reached the maximum of his physical strength.

「It...It seems that you can use that special technique now. Isn't that enough? 」

「Not yet. I want to master it. 'Cause I have to save the world. 」

「I see...Your world hasn't been saved yet...! 」

Then, the reckless Seiya gritted his teeth.

「Okay. I understand. Let's go for it until the very end. 」

However, the reckless Seiya pushed himself too hard. Not too long after that, he fell to the ground from exhaustion as if he were a cartoon character!

「He...Hey, are you okay!? 」

I rushed in Seiyas' direction. While I held the reckless Seiya that fainted to the ground, I scolded the cautious Seiya that didn't seem to care about his impersonator's condition.

「Seiya!! You have to adjust yourself!! This Seiya has a much lower status than yours!! 」

「Hmm. 」

The cautious Seiya approached the reckless Seiya, touched his heart, and then, he opened the closed eyelids of his impersonator with his fingers. I thought that he was checking his health state, but...

「After I observed him for a while, I realized that he is truly like the old me...As for our current situation.」

He didn't worry about the reckless Seiya's health state. The cautious Seiya was just analyzing his behavior and external appearance. Then, he looked at the cloudy sky outside of this town.

「He said that the sandstorm would go away in two or three days' time. Until then, our situation remains unchanged. I will continue to observe this town.」

After saying those words, our Seiya walked away by himself.

「Hey, wait a minute!! What should I do to the fallen Seiya!?!」

I couldn't leave the reckless Seiya unconscious on the ground. Therefore, I asked John Dae to help me take him to the inn.

—

We spoke with Gerstein to rent a room. Afterwards, we put the reckless Seiya on the bed. Then, John Dae left us, leaving only the reckless Seiya and me alone in the room.

As a precaution, I activated my clairvoyance ability to check the status of the reckless Seiya. It startled me when I saw the stats.

HP 3 / 70024

Hey!! He only had 3 HP points!! Was this person dying from excessive practice!?

He probably went over his limit in order to teach our Seiya that special technique. Since he almost died, this reckless Seiya slept the whole day.

—

Next day at noon. The reckless Seiya finally woke up.

「...Oh my. The Lady Goddess. 」

He saw me sitting on a chair next to his bed. His reaction irritated me.

「You shouldn't be saying, "Oh my. The Lady Goddess". You should be thinking about your health. Have you noticed that you pushed yourself too hard?」

Then, he slightly raised the corner of his mouth.

「But, that was amazing, you know. He didn't want to stop despite mastering the new technique. Actually, I'd be happy to just listen about the details. I feel like we're the same person, but at the same time, we're completely different.」

「Ah, yes, somewhat. I know you both very well. You two have many things in common, but on the other hand, you don't as well.」

「I heard from your hero that the demons forces have destroyed the heavenly world where your gods live. I wonder if that bad experience has been so painful that even changed the personality of your hero...」

It seemed that the reckless Seiya was thinking deeply about the cautious Seiya's current circumstances. Well, circumstances that were entirely different from those that he spoke about now. Speaking of which.

「Ex...Excuse me! You said that you've defeated the Demon King! So, does that mean that the Tarmine Kingdom of your world is safe now?」

「Yes, it's peaceful now. I'm currently based in Tarmine, and I've been watching over the safety of the world. I just visited Fulwaana to inspect their safety. I will return to Tarmine once the sandstorm goes away.」

「Then, does that mean that...Princess Tiana is alive!? 」

「Yeah. Tiana and our child are waiting for me to go home. 」

My heart beat violently.

「The...The unborn baby...was really born!! 」

「Yeah. It hasn't been long, so my child is still a baby. 」

「A boy? Or a girl? 」

「A girl. 」

「Is she healthy? 」

「She is a very healthy baby...Lady Goddess. Why are you crying?」

The reckless Seiya asked me why I was crying. I didn't realize that tears had started overflowing from my eyes.

「Ye...Yes. Don't mind it...But, Seiya. Aren't you going back to Japan? 」

「Yeah. I protected this world with my own life. So, I decided to stay. 」

I couldn't stop from crying because of this sensitive conversation. The world of the reckless Seiya. This must've been the world that I desired when I was Princess Tiana. No...Even the current me desired the same fate...

...Ahh...How happy would have been if this world was the real world?

The moment I thought so.

「Lista. The flowers next door are red, and the lawn looks blue. 」

I heard a cold voice in the room where the reckless Seiya and I were staying alone!

Ehhhhh!? Whe...Where did that voice come from!?

My heart was throbbing nervously! Then, I noticed that our Seiya was crawling from under the bed of the reckless Seiya!

Why was he under the bed again!? Was this his new place for hiding!?

The moment I screamed when I saw him beneath the bed! *bang* He grabbed my head and hit it against the structure of the bed!

「It hurtsssss!! Why the hell did you do that to me!? 」

「Don't fall asleep. Come back to reality. 」

「Ah!? 」

After that, the cautious Seiya left the room. I was perplexed for a while. When I finally settled down my feelings, I became extremely angry with him.

「I...I can't believe it!! That damn stalker!! He's always lurking underneath the bed of other people!!」

「Are you okay, Lady Goddess? 」

「Yes. Somehow... 」

The reckless Seiya was worried about my wounded head. "I knew it, the reckless Seiya was far more decent than the cautious Seiya"...That was what I really thought to myself.

—

The next day.

When I woke up in the cave, I noticed that our Seiya was no longer inside. I saw that he was busy doing muscular training, creating new golems, and investigating the town with his earth snakes. C'mon, take a break already!

Today, Kiriko went to the tent to play with Cleo. And, at the counter of the inn, I noticed that John Dae and Gerstein were talking and smiling.

...Oh my. It seemed that John Dae got along well with Gerstein. He was laughing so happily.

I decided just to watch from the sidelines.

「About the two Lord Seiyas, you see. I told the people of this town that they were twins. 」

「That helps. It can be confusing, mainly if we watch them at the same time. 」

Having said that, John Dae moved away from the counter and stared at the outside of the inn. He looked at the people coming and going on the streets like they were having a regular day. He spoke deeply then.

「This is a great town. Tarmine also used to be vibrant in the past. 」

「Oh? Have you not heard that the foreign Tarmine kingdom is still prosperous? People say that a beautiful princess and the hero who saved this world, alongside the wisdom of an excellent queen and her general, are managing the kingdom...」

「Is...Is that so! So, I'm doing well on this parallel world! I'm not undead, and Princess Tiana is still...」

A beautiful woman approached John Dae, who was impressed from the sights that happened on the outside of the inn. She brought a tea set on a tray.

「Actually, this is a crude tea, but please, have some. 」

「Ah! I appreciate your gesture! 」

The woman happily grabbed the teacup and tried to give it to John Dae. However! Before she gave the cup, this woman spilled the tea on John Dae's face!

「Ughhhhh!? 」

It was a terrible and outrageous act! However, I noticed that this woman didn't have any kind of reflection on her eyes and her expression didn't change at all!

「Wha...What!! Gerstein!? Who the hell is this woman!? 」

「I...I don't know! This woman is not from our inn! 」

And then, the woman's body glimmered with light! Suddenly, the beautiful woman transformed into the cautious Seiya with an armor cloth! Our Seiya spoke to John Dae with a cold tone.

「Don't get swayed. You're still a general. Always be vigilant of your surroundings.」

Ehhhh!? He turned into a woman with the art of change just to observe John Dae!?

Afterwards, the cautious Seiya left our side as if nothing much had happened...

「Hey isn't he the one who's impersonating some else!? 」

John Dae's painful feelings. I understood them very well.

—

I went to see Kiriko and Cleo after John Dae bathed with tea. I saw that our Seiya walked in the opposite direction. Perhaps, he won't be observing the children creepily. Even so, I felt anxious about it, because we were talking about that cautious Seiya after all! Yeah! Let's hope he won't be there!

Today, Cleo and Kiriko kneaded some clay again as Millie watched over them. Kiriko's pottery making skills had improved. I saw that the desks were lined up with various types of clay materials, such as plates and jars. They were probably drying out.

I asked the two of them who had their hands busy.

「Listen. What are you making now? 」

「We're going to do decorative pots. I'm doing the "Sun". 」

「I am doing the "Moon". 」

「Ahah. Hey, let's switch them later. 」

Cleo spoke with a wide smile on his face. However, Millie looked at Cleo with a sad complexion.

「The sandstorm surrounding our town is going to dissipate tomorrow. Cleo, keep working on those molds with her until then.」

「Ehh! Then, Kiriko, that means that you're leaving us! 」

「Ye...Yes. I am on the journey to defeat the Demon King. 」

「Ah, yeah. But, you're leaving even though we're finally friends now. 」

「I'm sorry... 」

Millie looked at me.

「It takes a full month to complete the materials made of pottery. Miss Goddess. Would you like to come to this town again once your journey is finished?」

「Yes. I understand. We'll come again. 」

「Well then, let's start baking them now. 」

Millie approached a large furnace outside of the tent. Cleo followed his mother Millie.

「Mom! Hurry up and bake Kiriko's pottery as well! 」

「Yes, yes. 」

I stared warmly at them. Then, Kiriko nodded her head slightly.

「Miss Lista. If the Demon King didn't rule the world, then would I be granted the wish to have a peaceful life?」

「Kiri... 」

I wished that time could slow down for her to enjoy herself more. However, the moment that Millie opened the lid of the furnace with tools, everybody freaked out.

I saw Seiya's face inside of the furnace! From there, came out the cautious Seiya wrapped up in flames!

「Gyahhhhhhhh!! 」

「Whoahhhhhhhh!! It's a monsterrrrrr!! 」

Millie and Cleo screamed aloud. Both Kiriko and I were speechless from this bizarre occurrence. Our Seiya's body was all covered in fire. Our Seiya had a serious-looking expression on his face. I slowly opened my mouth.

「Se...Se...Seiya!! Isn't it hot!? 」

「My body is protected with fire magic. So, it's just a little hot. 」

「Of course, it's hot!! 」

While burning, Seiya approached Kiriko.

「Kiriko. We have our world. Don't wish for something else. 」

「Ye...Yes. I'm sorry... 」

I couldn't stand this anymore and I yelled at our Seiya.

「Seiya!! Stop observing your comrades one by one so creepily!! 」

「I do it because everyone is being careless. Don't forget that this town is already under the rule of the Death Emperor.」

「Tha...That was not what I was speaking about!! 」

「The sandstorm will leave tomorrow. We will leave this town at once if we don't find any abnormality. So, get ready.」

He just said what he wanted to say and walked away immediately.

...It...It felt as if he smashed John Dae, Kiriko and I's good mood to the ground ...!

Cleo nodded angrily.

「I knew it; I really dislike that Lord Seiya...! He "smells" like a true criminal...! 」

I agreed with Cleo's words. Then, I noticed that Millie was carefully checking out the furnace where Seiya came from. I apologized to Millie on behalf of our cautious Seiya.

「I'm truly sorry. Please don't mind our criminal...no, our Seiya's actions. 」

「Ah, it's okay, it's okay. It seems that the furnace isn't broken. 」

「I don't know what is the real deal of that stalker... 」

I frowned heatedly because of this ridiculousness. Yet, Millie laughed gently.

「For example, some people use their favorite pottery in their daily lives, while others keep them in a cupboard so that they won't break.」

「...Ah? 」

「When you come to like something, there are people who express their love honestly, while others will watch silently from a distance. When I saw the behavior of that Lord Seiya, I thought that his observance of you was a form of his love.」

「No...No, Millie. I don't think that's a form of love. Actually, he's been observing us so that we won't give him any trouble.」

Still, Millie kept smiling gently at me.

—

Then, the morning of our departure day.

While I woke up, and moved my right foot forward...

「It hurtssssssss!! 」

I felt extreme pain! When I looked down, I saw that an earth snake bit my leg!

「Wha...What the hell!? 」

Then, the earth snake opened its mouth and uttered Seiya's voice.

「It's morning. Get up, Lista. 」

Apparently, it was an earth snake mobile phone, however...

「This is an absurd wake-up call!! 」

「Just get ready. I found an enemy's shadow outside of this town. 」

「An...An enemy's shadow!? Huh!? Hello!? Are you there!? Hello!?...That bastard!!」

Anyway, I immediately changed my clothes and jumped out of the room.

Chapter 108: The Cautious Hero

When I tried to yell at Seiya for waking me up so violently, but as soon as I got out of his cave I became startled. Dozens of wooden buckets were placed on the ground. They projected Fulwaana's surrounding areas.

Seiya, Kiriko and John Dae were around those wooden buckets that reflected the images from the earth snakes. And then...

「Hey, hey. What is really going on? 」

「You know, this morning... 」

The golems led the people of Fulwaana to one particular area.

「Seiya!! Why are you doing that!? 」

「I already told you. There are enemies outside of this town. To minimize the damage, I gathered these people into one spot.」

「Is...Is that so...But, enemies, you said!? 」

Seiya pointed to one of those wooden buckets. It projected the image of a huge brown dragon fighting against a group of golems.

「Dra...Dragon!! Is it really true that a dragon is out there!? 」

「This is a footage from Fulwaana's northwest area. 」

I freaked out when I saw the other wooden buckets that Seiya showed to me.

A cyclops and a chimera! Other unusual monsters were fighting against Seiya's golem army!

One person of the townspeople screamed when it stared at the wooden buckets.

「Lo...Look at this!! It's the King Scorpion!! 」

The other wooden bucket showed a giant scorpion with a golden hue.

「...No way...It's impossible! 」

I heard a familiar voice. When I looked back, I saw that the reckless Seiya was extremely shocked.

「I exterminated the King Scorpion! Moreover, the cyclops, the dragon, and the chimera...Those were the opponents that my party fought and won one year ago!」

Ehh!! Then, did that mean that the corpses of those monsters resurrected and came back to attack this town!?

The townspeople saw how shocked their Seiya was looking at the buckets. One of them asked him with a worried face.

「Lo...Lord Seiya! Is our town going to be okay? 」

Then, the reckless Seiya pulled the sword out of his sheath without looking back.

「I'll go and get rid of them. I will protect the people of Fulwaana. 」

The crowd shouted 「Ohh! 」 .

I...I knew it! This Seiya behaved like a true hero! However...

「I don't want you to get involved in this. So, don't move. 」

The cautious Seiya pushed him away.

「...What did you say? 」

The reckless Seiya stared at our Seiya with serious eyes. But, our Seiya was the cautious Seiya, so he didn't respond immediately nor even looked at the reckless Seiya.

「The golems placed outside of this town are already fighting against the enemies. In addition, the earth snakes are monitoring the town. You have no role in this fight.」

The cautious Seiya finally looked at us after saying that the reckless Seiya was niggling. John Dae spoke with a difficult face.

「Even so, it's strange that these enemies decided to attack this town so suddenly.」

「Yeah. Maybe the Death Emperor's plans have changed. 」

「Plans? What's that? 」

「...Wait a minute. 」

The cautious Seiya interrupted his conversation with John Dae. I was surprised when I looked at the other direction. The reckless Seiya didn't listen to our Seiya and was walking away from us! The cautious Seiya chased after the reckless Seiya, grabbed his shoulder and pulled him to our side once again.

「Hey. What are you trying to do? 」

「I'm leaving this town in order to defeat the enemies. 」

「Are you stupid? Didn't I say to you not to get involved in this? 」

「This town is being attacked! How can I watch it from the sidelines! 」

「You are useless. You are weaker than Kiriko and John Dae. 」

After saying that, the reckless Seiya spoke with a relaxed expression on his face.

「Gonna be okay. 」

On that very moment, I saw that our Seiya jerked his nose slightly.

Thi...This was bad!! Our Seiya was absolutely angry!!

I felt a dangerous air around them and I jumped between the two. I tried to persuade the reckless Seiya to stay here for the moment.

「It...It's going to be all right! Let's leave these fights to the golems! Besides, if it gets unsafe for the townspeople, we can always build an outer wall with the power of earth magic. Isn't that right, Seiya?」

I tried to make the cautious Seiya to agree with my way of calming down the reckless Seiya. Still, the reckless Seiya didn't go along with my flow. He wrinkled between his eyebrows and spoke harshly to the cautious Seiya.

「I'm going. I'm a hero. And I'm the one who defeated the Demon King. 」

「You must have defeated a weak Demon King from a weak world. At your current level, you won't be able to defeat the monsters that are trying to attack this town. How many times do I have to repeat it until you understand?」

「No. The heart of justice makes me stronger. 」

This time, our Seiya's nose trembled hard.

「Stop saying bullshit. Your justice is false. 」

「Take back what you just said! How can you only say bad things! 」

「I just told you the truth. 」

The two Seiyas glared at each other with hate! Then, Kiriko shouted at them to stop the imminent danger of a battle scene.

「Ple...Please you two! Calm down! More importantly! 」

I was astonished when Kiriko pointed to one of the wooden buckets. The enemies, including the dragon, the cyclops, the chimera, and the King Scorpion, collapsed on the ground!

「Ehh!! They beat them that quickly!? 」

Apparently, while the two Seiyas argued with each other, the golems defeated all of the enemies. I felt relieved. Yet, our Seiya's expression was severe.

「Don't be happy. This battle isn't probably over. No...It's going to start now.」

He really had sharp eyes. Before long, dark smokes got out of the enemies' bodies and ascended to the sky.

I took my eyes away from the wooden bucket and stared at the sky above our heads. The black smoke raised up and covered the entire area of Fulwaana's town! It slowly formed a black cloud!

「My name is Silshete, the Death Emperor...I control death and destruction.」

Unexpectedly, a loud voice roared throughout the whole town! The voice that spoke to us felt like an eerie voice that echoed from the depths of hell.

「Hero. First, I must say that you were quite superb. If you had acknowledged this fictional world created by the secret power of souls from the evil god, your existence would've been swallowed and disappeared entirely...」

If...If he had acknowledged this, his soul would've been swallowed and disappear...Seriously!?

Once, I thought in Fulwaana that, "How happy would have been if this world was the real world?". Actually, I wasn't the only one. John Dae and Kiriko were probably the same as me. But, the truth is...That was the aim of the evil god! At those times, if our Seiya didn't disturb us, then we may have disappeared by now!

John Dae was surprised by this. He stared at the cautious Seiya and asked him a question.

「Don't tell me that you already knew about this!? 」

「Of course. I considered this possibility. 」

Perhaps, our cautious Seiya thought about dozens of...Actually, maybe hundreds of different possibilities...Either way, the evil god's attempt to kill us all failed.

「This world doesn't need to exist anymore... 」

I got shivers when I heard the sinister words of the Death Emperor.

「Ma...Maybe, the Death Emperor is going to erase the people of this town!? Se...Seiya!! What should we do!?!」

「As a precaution, I put earth snakes hidden on each person of this town. The moment the earth snake bites each person, it will make him or her into wandering spirits. It's an extra form of the technique taught by the Goddess of Seclusion, Nephitet.」

「I see! So, their spirit will remain even if their body ceases to exist! 」

「Yeah. It's kind of a bitter plan. But, if it really happens, I can always transfer their wandering spirits into earth snakes or golems in order to save them.」

Cleo had a worried complexion next to Kiriko.

「He...Hey, Kiriko. Are we going to be fine? 」

「Yes! You're going to be fine! Mister Seiya prepared himself to save all of you! 」

Kiriko replied with a bright voice. Then, our Seiya whispered as he snapped his finger.

「...Ghost Bites. 」

The earth snakes opened their mouths and bit most of the people. The people of Fulwaana fell to the ground, and then, their spirits separated from their bodies.

...Our Seiya really thought of a great plan like this! He has been preparing all along! This way, we were going to save these people...Uh...Eh...?

I doubted my own eyes! The bodies of the fallen people of Fulwaana disappeared like sand, together with their spirited bodies!

「So...It doesn't work. 」

The cautious Seiya spoke with a low tone.

「It...It doesn't work, you say? 」

The voice of the Death Emperor echoed while our Seiya remained silent.

「Whatever you do won't work. Fictional humans that don't exist in this world have no means of survival. Those people can't escape from their fate. When the power of the evil god gets released, everything that was created with it shall disappear forever.」

The people of Fulwaana that stood around me became sand one after another! I shook the shoulder of the cautious Seiya impatiently!

「Seiya!! Don't you have another method to save them!? 」

However, our Seiya silently removed the Ghost Bites. All of Fulwaana's wandering spirits returned to their original bodies.

「It's impossible. There's nothing I can do. 」

「Ehh!? Se...Seiya!! 」

From my experience, I believed that our Seiya would've been able to overcome this situation. Still, our Seiya didn't move at all. I could only hear the Death Emperor's voice instead.

「Are you trying to find a way to save the people of this fictional world? Okay, now let the spectacle begin. When the fictional world begins to disappear, the memory of the ones from the real world who witnessed it will turn...into despair.」

Gerstein and Millie were startled as they watched their bodies turn into sand.

「I remember it now...I was...We were... 」

「That's right...We were...killed by the Demon King's army one year ago. 」

「Ah...Cleo...My Cleo... 」

The bodies of Gerstein and Millie were splattered as sand as they tried to get closer to Cleo.

「Gerstein! Millie! 」

John Dae shouted aloud. Kiriko screamed towards the other direction.

「Mister Seiya! Cleo is...! 」

Cleo's feet gradually turned into sand.

...Wha...What...There was no way we could help them!?

But, our Seiya didn't move. I had no other choice but to stand still. Cleo spoke while looking at Kiriko.

「So...I was already dead... 」

Cleo, who was crying with tears falling from his face, suddenly smiled at Kiriko.

「Li...Listen, Kiriko! You have to defeat the Demon King! I'm sure that, as long as the Demon King lives, there'll be people like me around this world! You must stop him!」

「Cleo...! 」

「I was happy...to be friends with Kiriko. 」

Kiriko reached for Cleo. But, before she could reach him, Cleo's smiling face disappeared in sand.

「Ugh...This is...This is too cruel... 」

Kiriko lowered her head. Then, the Death Emperor's voice echoed throughout the deserted town of Fulwaana.

「Return to sand. Everything that doesn't exist. 」

It wasn't just the people. The town of Fulwaana, everything including the houses and tents, became mere sand. Still, only the reckless Seiya remained intact. He didn't look away, and gritted his teeth to resist this dark fate so desperately.

「Seiya!! 」

I ran towards the reckless Seiya. He was shaking his body so much.

「Ah...I see. So, everything was fictional. I didn't go to the Sage Village. I...I couldn't protect my loved ones...I couldn't even save my unborn child...」

Before disappearing, the reckless Seiya approached the cautious Seiya. On his way, the reckless Seiya's feet became sand and he collapsed right in front of the cautious Seiya.

「You were correct...My justice was false. 」

I noticed that tears were overflowing from the reckless Seiya's eyes. It was the first time I saw Seiya cry.

「I should've thought more deeply about it...I should've prepared for this but I didn't... 」

「Seiya...! 」

Soon, the reckless Seiya's regret and sorrow transmitted to me so painfully that my chest started to hurt. I began to cry as well.

「Tiana. Please forgive me... 」

I couldn't speak nor could I look directly at him. It was a very sad and painful scene. So, all I could do was hug the reckless Seiya, who was about to disappear.

「I'm fine!! I'm absolutely fine!! 」

The reckless Seiya had no reason to know that I was the reincarnation of Princess Tiana. Still...

「Thank you. Lady Goddess... 」

He replied to me with his last strength. Nonetheless, the cautious Seiya looked down on the reckless Seiya with disgusting eyes.

「Miserable. What an idiot. You really are an idiot. 」

「I apologize... 」

「But, I'm here now because of the idiot you. 」

「I have one wish. You must defeat...the Death Emperor and the Demon King... 」

「I don't need you to tell me that. 」

I saw a little smile of the face of the reckless Seiya.

「I leave everything in your hands...Cautious Hero. 」

The reckless Seiya's body became sand and scattered around the cautious Seiya's feet. This scene was a cruel sight that made me want to turn away...Still, at that time; it looked as if the two Seiyas merged together in one body.

「Eve...Everything became sand...! 」

John Dae spoke with a sad tone. I noticed that we were standing on only ruins. It was a desert as far as the eye could see. Only human bones spread on the sand.

Before I knew it, the huge black clouds that covered the town fused together and formed a giant skull.

「Their fate remained the same even though they regained a fictional life. They tasted two deaths, and their despair was filled with further despair. These raw emotions will make my power stronger.」

Under the joyous voice of the Death Emperor...

「Cleo, Cleo...! 」

Kiriko was crying while she held Cleo's sand in her chest.

「What an absolute ghastly monster!! 」

John Dae clenched his fists with anger. Of course, I was outraged as well. The people of Fulwaana were killed, not once but twice, at the hands of the Demon King. It was painful, sad and scary when everyone turned into sand.

...Death Emperor Silshete! I won't forgive him! Never!

Suddenly, next to me, I heard a few footsteps that went forward. When I saw that Seiya held his sword, I felt something cold running through my back.

...I felt that his anger and sadness were left somewhere else. He walked through the sand that once belonged to the reckless Seiya without even looking down. There was only the figure of a complete hero who disposed all of unnecessary emotions for battle, and focused his senses only for the purpose of defeating the enemy.

「You told me that my fate remained the same. Then... 」

Our Seiya looked at the giant skull in the sky.

「Your fate of being defeated by me remains unchanged as well. 」

...still ongoing...