Episode 358.

Ellen was proudly claiming to have received the sun god's holy relic, just as she had received her lunch from her mother.

The situation was so ridiculous that it left me in a daze.

"And there was no Alixion?"

When I asked if there were any relics of Riter, the god of courage, Ellen brought her index finger to her lips and shook her head.

What is.

This is the kind of time when I'd be tempted to call it cute, but not today.

"I don't know. Maybe it was there, maybe it wasn't."

What the hell is she talking about?

"I thought you said you lived in the country?"

"Yes."

What the hell is a holy relic doing in a small town somewhere in Cernstadt?

"Why the hell is there a holy relic in a small town somewhere in Cernstadt?"

When I thought about it, I realized it was a no-brainer, so I just spit it out.

"I don't know, Mom and Dad just gave it to me and didn't explain anything."

A warrior and his sister.

I thought there might be some settings there, but it was obvious that there was some kind of ugly background.

Speaking of which.

He once told me that his family was powerful.

Was that a double-wire or something?

As I stood there speechless in disbelief, Ellen's mouth began to water.

"I want to know more. It's not that you can't tell me, it's that you really don't know."

It's not that he won't talk to you, it's that he can't," Ellen said wistfully.

You make me feel sorry for people.

"Oh, no....... You're not mad at me....... It's just that I don't understand it. Would you believe me?"

Rural village of Canchon (with two warriors).

I do.

It's a ridiculous setup in the original, so why not make it even more ridiculous now that it's fleshed out?

If anything, it's there to make things more interesting.

Anyway, Cloak of the Sun God.

On the collar of Ellen's cloak of flame, as with all holy items, there were words that only I could recognize.

[Immortalized by hatred].

Hate.

It was an eerie word, and I couldn't help but freeze for a moment.

I now know what the emblazoned sentences mean.

The inscription on the tiara.

[I will purify the world with my anger].

In my anger, I was able to unleash the true power of Tiamata.

You didn't have to be a priest to use holy power.

If so, hate.

Is the Sun God's cloak an object that responds to hate?

And another one.

I wanted to double-check that with my own eyes.

"Show me the comment ......."

"Yes."

At my request, Ellen summoned Ramen in her right hand.

Lament, the moon sword.

[It shall be wrought with tears].

Tears are sadness.

Lapelt, the cloak of the sun god.

[Immortalized by hatred].

And hate.

"Why the ......?"

Sadness and hatred.

Can the two coexist.

"I was just wondering how cool it would be to wear both."

"......?"

They should be able to coexist.

If I were you, I'd be able to elicit both emotions from Ellen at the same time.

With the new topic of Ellen's hometown, my imagination was growing ominous.

In the last Demon War, Ragan Artorius left some ramen for Ellen. I hadn't set any intentions for him, so I didn't know why he left the ramen for Ellen.

However, Ellen's hometown also had a holy relic, the Cloak of the Sun God.

You've left two holy relics behind, when one would have been enough, and you're about to fight a demon.

What the heck does Ellen's hometown do?

I'm guessing it's a secret society of some sort, after all.

Assuming that Ellen was too young to keep a secret, her parents didn't tell her the truth about the village.

He, too, told me that he brought it home with him, though I don't know if he'll tell anyone else.

I have an ominous feeling.

Cantus Magna.

Nowhere does it say that they only collect magic.

You may need a holy object in some sense, and indeed, holy objects are imbued with powerful, if not magical, powers.

Ellen's hometown is.......

It may be Cantus Magna.

Then.

What the heck am I supposed to do?

Ellen looks at me and says still.

"Hey, did you miss me?"

"......?"

It's so out of the blue that I can't help but stare a bit. As I stare, Ellen's mouth pops open.

"I, uh, missed you."

Ellen looks at me as if I'm not going to answer quickly enough.

You want to ask them something, but instead of asking, they want something else.

I don't know why they do this.

"You missed....... of course."

At my words, Ellenin Bashish laughed.

It was only for a moment, but it was a smile that made all my worries disappear.

\* \* \*

Ellen has gained a new Relic, the Rapelt of the Sun God.

This makes him the only person on the continent since Lagan Artorius to hold two holy relics.

"You're better off keeping this a secret, it'll only bother them more if they know you have it."

"......Yes. I see."

Ellen seemed to think about it, and then summoned Rafelt back.

The Empire finds out where Lagan Artorius is from and admits Ellen to the Temple.

If we consider whether or not the Empire knows that Ellen's hometown is an unusual place, the odds are further tilted in favor of not knowing.

So if it was known that Ellen had brought the sun god's cloak from her homeland, there was a chance that the imperial family would pay unnecessary attention to it.

If it's Cantus Magna, it's best not to mess with it, so it's better that the Empire doesn't know about it, and if it's not, it's better to leave it alone, because it's a place that doesn't do any good.

In the end, Ellen's parents didn't tell her much.

Lagan Artorius hadn't originally set out for an adventure, but to find something. He learned so much about what was going on in the world that he decided he couldn't leave it the way it was, Ellen explained.

It's clear that Ellen's hometown doesn't interfere much in the affairs of the world. So it's likely that Ellen's parents weren't particularly supportive of their son going off to fight the devil.

A mysterious secret society and Ellen's hometown.

Despite the ominous foreboding, I couldn't help but make a mental note of it.

\* \* \*

Ellen is back. With the Sun God's cloak.

Charlotte began researching ways to restore her condition using the conjuration technique she found in the Demon Castle bunker.

And Herriot de Saint-Ouen.

The next day. I asked Harriet to share her story of what she'd figured out so far.

"Imaginary dimensions?"

"Yes."

I couldn't help but shake my head as I listened to Herriot's explanation.

"It's a theory about a dimension that doesn't really exist, an imaginary map set up to maintain a warp gate system."

"......I don't understand."

"Whoa, you punk."

"......Suddenly?"

I couldn't help but be caught off guard by the barrel that came out of nowhere, and Herriot chuckled to himself, satisfied that he had fed me a surprise attack.

No.

But to come in at this time?

"No, but isn't that cheating, because if we're going to talk about magic, how can I not be a jerk?"

Herriot squeaked at my words.

"Did you say I'm a punk because I'm a real punk?"

"No I didn't call you stupid to mean you're stupid, I called you stupid to mean....... Uhm. Okay, sorry."

It's not my place to make fun of the bottomless pit.

"I'm going to explain it to you properly, so listen carefully."

Herriot began to explain.

She knew I wouldn't get it if she threw a bunch of jargon at me, so she broke it down to a level I could understand.

After listening to the explanation, it was surprisingly easy to understand.

It's a subway map.

Subway maps are drawn without regard to the actual distances and terrain between stations. As such, they are drawn for the convenience of the viewer, not the actual terrain.

The imaginary dimension is different in that it's for the designer, not the user, but it's not much different from a subway map in that it's a map that's meant to be viewed for its own sake, not for the sake of reality.

"Do you have any idea what I'm talking about?"

"Uh, I get it."

"......."

Harriet looked at me with a glazed look in her eyes that said, "That can't be right.

No.

I couldn't explain to him what a subway map was, so he got it right!

"In any case, this imaginary dimension doesn't exist, but there are a lot of formulas and spells that assume it does, so the mages involved in maintaining the warp gate facilities need to understand the imaginary dimension first."

The new concept of imaginary dimensions.

"Wait, so you're saying that once I get used to the whole false dimension thing, I can interfere with dogs and cows and warp gate systems?"

"......, so to speak."

At my ominous sound, Harriet muttered to herself, as if sensing an ominous premonition.

"That's the least of my worries, though, because even with an understanding of the False Dimension, interfering with the Warp Gate system is no easy task. Building the Warp Gate itself isn't that difficult, but interfering with its core operations seems to be limited to a select group of mages throughout the Empire."

It's not hard to build or operate a machine, but it's hard to mess with the machine's systems.

"So I've been told that only the elite of the elite, and a select group of Imperial mages, are authorized to interfere with the Warp Gate itself."

Everyone knows that warp gates are as dangerous as they are convenient, so the Empire had no choice but to keep them secure.

That said, it's also quite unusual that Herriot was able to access the concept of imaginary dimensions this time around.

And that was at my request, not Herriot's.

With the imperial crest, I have access to the Empire's top secrets. I don't need a credibility check when I saved the life of an empress.

"But there seems to be some disagreement among professional researchers."

"Grind?"

"I thought there were some people who thought the imaginary dimension might actually exist?"

"What?"

The words sent goosebumps all over my body.

"So I guess this is just an educated guess since it hasn't been professionally studied......."

With a narrowed brow, Harriet recounts what she heard.

"Where do gates actually exist?" I think it's because of this question."

"Where do you mean, isn't it right in front of you?"

"A gate is both an entrance and an exit, but it doesn't really exist in the space of an entrance or the space of an exit. It's somewhere in the middle, and the question is, where is that middle?"

Exists in both the exit and entrance spaces at the same time.

A gate is essentially two states in one space.

"So the gate that we see is actually in a different dimension, and when we go through the gate, we experience a little bit of a delay, you know?"

"......."

You definitely get a very brief sense of walking through a gate and passing something.

"And then there's this space that you pass through, which researchers call the spatial dead end, and even professional researchers don't know where it is."

Warp gates are being used, but even researchers don't fully understand the magic of warp gates.

"So what you're saying is that you've created a system of warp gates in an imaginary dimension, a fictitious dimension, and it turns out that it actually exists. We don't know if it's because there are more warp gates, or if it was always there."

Herriot looks at me with his arms crossed.

"So, I know this is all a bunch of bullshit and more speculation than research, but if there is an otherworld and it's an imaginary dimension, it's not going to be populated by people or anything like you want it to be, right?"

Dead ends in space.

Herriot's conclusion seemed to be that if there really is such a thing, it's just an imaginary dimension, a space of nothingness, and that there can be an otherworld, but there can't be an otherworldly existence.

"Anyway, nothing's certain, so I'll keep looking, but I'll probably only end up knowing more about this world and warp gates. I don't particularly want to be a warp gate technician."

He was explaining to her the uses and methods of the warp gate he had discovered, but what she would actually need to understand would require a higher level of intelligence. And it was clear that he was coming to grips with it very quickly.

"No fun?"

"No? Who says it's not funny?"

Herriot said, as if the prospect of having the Empire's best-kept secrets scooped up like sweets was something he was happy to do, and saw no reason not to.

She doesn't want to be a warp gate technician, but she's basically an honors student who thinks the more the merrier when it comes to magical knowledge.

"Anyway, I don't think the warp gate system has much to do with the otherworld you're wondering about."

No.

I actually felt like I was getting the strands right.

However.

There were so many clues, so many things going on, all with their own risks, that I wasn't sure where the real problem was.

Warp Gate.

Imaginary dimensions.

Cantus Magna.

Akasha.

Black Order.

Balie Jr.

Ellen's hometown.

There were so many clues scattered about, it felt like my head was going to crack. Herriot stood up from his seat, as if he had explained all that needed to be explained.

"I'm going to check out the Magical Research Society because they've made some progress, do you want to come with me?"

"Sure."

I followed Harriet out of the room, because nothing would be more satisfying than to finish either Power Cartridge or Moonshine this winter break.

\* \* \*

As I left the dormitory and headed toward the Ministry of Magic, a familiar face stood at the entrance.

"......Sir?"

Herriot was surprised to see Mr. Effinghauser in his dormitory and greeted him.

I already knew that Royal Class teachers don't do much hanging out, even on vacation, so I wasn't surprised when he showed up.

As always, Mr. Eppinhauser, with his cold, impassive demeanor, looked at me and gestured with his chin to the outside of the dormitory.

"Reinhard, follow me for a second."

Herriot looked at me as if he was sorry to see me go, and whispered in my ear.

"I'll fill you in on the research society stuff later."

"Uh....... Yeah."

It's winter break, I don't have classes, what the hell am I doing?

Is this a problem with Saviolin Tana or Charlotte? They have returned to the Palace of Spring to study the art of marriage. They'll need me if Charlotte's powers go haywire, but for now, my research on the art is my priority.

Leaving the royal class dormitory, Mr. Effinghauser walked beside me.

Problem child instincts.

"Did I do something....... accident?"

I don't want to be called in by my homeroom teacher.

But you haven't gotten in trouble lately. The last time I got in trouble was with Oscar de Gradias.

Although not an accident.

Does attending a cross-dressing convention count as an accident?

I'm thinking about that.

"Why are you cross-dressing?"

"!"

I felt like my head was going to explode from the suddenness of it all.

No, was that really it?

Did Bertus say?

Or do you just know because you're a teacher?

Are these assholes in student government?

Mr. Epinhauser didn't seem to be criticizing, nor did he seem to be chastising.

As if they were just curious.

"That, that. That....... that."

Dr. Effinghauser watched me for a moment, then shook his head.

"Forget it. If that's what your walls are like, it's none of my business."

"Oh, no?! Standing, ramparts? That's not what it is, is it?"

It's crazy!

I'm gonna kill you for leaving the pageant! How long are you gonna keep this up?! Now that you've gained the talent to control magic, you want me to beat you up some more?

"If that's not a city wall, what is?"

"Oh, no. Oh, excuse me. That......."

At least then you have the lame excuse that it was all about the money!

"Forget it. That's not really what I'm asking."

"What? Then what......."

"Do you have the information about Cantus Magna ready?"

"!"

In a word.

The blood in my veins seemed to run cold.

Episode 359.

When Dr. Epinhauser asked me if I had any information on the Cantus Magna, I had no answer for a while.

Effinghauser was a member of the Black Order. He didn't mince words. He seemed to be waiting for me to calm down, as if this was a surprise.

The Black Order saw me with the Lord Vampire.

It turns out that I'm not just a Temple student, and Rabbi Effinghauser has known that ever since Aaron Mede's death.

So, the black-robed person who was in contact with me at the time was actually EpinHauser?

I know it's not the right thing to be thinking about.

Was it you who called me a pretty boy?

Regardless, it felt like a knife in the back of my throat.

It's been a long time since one word from Mr. Epinhauser could have ended it all.

You may not have known until recently that I'm Valerie, heir to the Demon King, but with a vampire in my employ, it shouldn't be hard to deduce who I am in relation to the current state of the Empire.

My true identity has already been discovered.

Mr. Effinghauser, who has a setting called Patriot, left me alone.

What is the Black Order up to, and what do they want?

I realized the obvious truth: I didn't know the Black Order, any more than I knew the Cantus Magna.

There are many times when I've felt fear.

I've felt the fear of losing something, the fear of dying, all of those things.

But.

I was thinking that I could lose everything I held at any moment.

Fear coursed through my body as I realized that everything I already had could be blown away at any moment by a simple decision by the Black Order.

In a state of terror unlike anything I've ever felt, I stared at the EpinHauser.

"Why did you let me....... Why did you leave me alone?"

"We don't play fast and loose."

In the midst of all the normal classes, training, and festive rush, I could have lost it all.

The Black Order was watching me.

There's no way I'm not aware that I'm the next Demon King.

"Information about Cantus Magna. Do you have it?"

What are you going to do with me without it?

Do I take it by force, or do you threaten me by saying you're going to end my temple life?

We approached the Black Order as equals, and we didn't use honorifics.

But EpinHauser.

In front of this person, I somehow choke like a mouse in front of a cat.

He's not overbearing, and he doesn't try to berate or intimidate me.

He was just staring at me with a cold expression and calm eyes, just like the first time I met his eyes.

It was putting me in a state of endless panic.

What I can tell you right now, only one thing. The Black Order wants information about Cantus Magna.

"There is. It's called....... I don't know if you guys know it or not."

"I see."

On my end, I have the information they want.

And what I wanted was information about the portal to the otherworld.

"Unfortunately, we have no information or magic about portals to other worlds."

The Black Order doesn't know about the magic I want.

But the Black Order can force me to answer. Or I will be forced to reveal the whole truth and be prepared to leave the Temple.

Not because Dr. Effinghauser was a member of the Black Order, though that was always a possibility once the Black Order found out I was a Lord Vampire. But I had an uncanny conviction that they wouldn't choose that option.

"You have the information we need, but we don't have anything to give you."

If so, the transaction must be closed.

"Then let me ask you a question. We do not have the information you seek, but the Order is willing to cooperate fully with you if you provide us with information about Cantus Magna. Perhaps that will lead you to what you truly seek."

"......."

The Black Order is not aware of any otherworldly portal magic.

But you're saying you'll be on my side if I give you information about Cantus Magna.

"If I refuse....... What happens?"

Dr. Effinghauser stares at me.

"Nothing will happen."

"However."

"We'll be watching you."

That sent chills down my spine.

They know my real identity.

And you're just going to stand by and watch, never touching me, never revealing my identity, never doing anything.

What it is.

What does the Black Order want?

The end of Cantus Magna?

Or something else?

The Magical Order is a group indifferent to the affairs of the world, loyal only to their principles and purpose.

But if they don't get it from me, they're going to walk away.

What does it mean when you say you'll be watching me after that.

I am a demon infiltrating the Temple Royal class. The one who said he'd keep an eye on me regardless of the deal.

That, in itself, somewhat suggests that the Black Order is not a group that is indifferent to the world.

"The Black Order, what is it for?"

Dr. Effinghauser stared at me in silence as I asked my question, and then he spoke up.

"I haven't made a judgment call about whether or not I should tell you that."

You're not going to tell me.

"However, we have not yet judged you as an enemy."

They haven't decided if they're going to do anything about me because they're not a group that moves easily, but they're thinking about it.

The moment I made contact with the Black Order, I was already in their range. I was always prepared for this kind of danger. You can't just do safe things in a safe place.

They just didn't know that the truth was that Dr. Effinghauser was a member of the Black Order.

If I go after Cantus Magna with the Order, they will be on my side.

If I don't, they'll be watching me, and at any moment they may decide to label me as an enemy and eliminate me.

Hand of the Black Order.

Is it really right to grab this?

However, I had already figured out the identity, and I was surprised that it was Mr. Effinghauser who found out, but I was prepared for the situation.

However, you can make any number of unidentified allies.

An ally with unknown intentions is no reason not to accept them.

This is not a situation where we can wring our hands. The clock is ticking, and the gate is closing.

If they're joining hands with me, they must be doing it to spy on me. Otherwise, they wouldn't be talking about watching me.

"Okay, let's work together."

For now, we'll work with the Black Order to track down Cantus Magna.

Later, later, later.

After a verbal but important deal is struck, Dr. Eppinhauser looks at me, his face still serious.

"Okay, I'll ask again."

"......Yes."

Do I have to tell you the secret about Cantus Magna?

But what if the Black Order is just going to listen to the information and say I don't know?

Dr. Effinghauser asks me.

"Why the hell are you cross-dressing?"

No.

Seriously, stop harassing me!

\* \* \*

Dr. Effinghauser and I went for a walk in a less than leisurely mood.

Mr. Effinghauser never asked why I needed magic to open a portal.

The settings I wrote should be true.

Mr. Effinghauser is a patriot, that's a fact.

So, if there is a connection between Effinghauser being in the Black Order and being a patriot, is the Black Order an organization associated with the Empire?

I don't think so. I don't think the Emperor, Charlotte, or Bertus know who I am. If they do, the Black Order may be related to the Empire, but not the Imperial family.

Somehow, only in front of this person do I feel like a mouse in front of a cat.

It's become a bizarre alliance of Black Order and demonic remnants, but basically I recognize him as a teacher.

By the way.

The Black Order already knows who I am, my life is in jeopardy, and I need the power for now, so I said, "Let's work together.

I'm not asking about cantus magna.

Why do they keep asking me why I cross-dress.......

Are you just trying to annoy me by asking that at the expense of more important things?

A demon who infiltrated the royal class and won a cross-dressing contest?

and.......

I'm sure you'll be interested to know that.......

What the hell were you thinking?

By the way.

There's a position, there's a position, there's a position.

By the way, I'm not asking you to come up with information about Cantus Magna, I'm asking you why you keep entering cross-dressing contests.......

Dr. Effinghauser didn't bother to answer, and I just stood there with a dying look on my face, like a sinner, not knowing what to say.

I want to die.

I'd rather die in a different dimension than get caught by Bertus.

Still, Bertus realizes that his classmate is cross-dressing.

The Black Order is capable of doing things on the scale of continental warfare, and the guy who had the audacity to kill Leviathan Rancher had gone off to do something as silly as a cross-dressing contest before it happened.

"That....... must....... say?"

"Whenever possible."

"No, why?"

Teacher.

I'm going to lose my mind.

Can't you just say, "What's your evil intent, what are you trying to do by opening the gate, we've already figured out your dirty little secret and who you are"?

Sickness.

I have to explain why I'm dressed as a woman to a member of a weird secret society like you, and why you want to know about it!

Dr. Effinghauser looks at me and says.

"Are you ashamed?"

"......."

"He asked me if I was embarrassed to explain why I cross-dressed."

"No, you wouldn't be embarrassed?"

If you're going to do this, just kill me! I feel like I'm being mentally murdered!

"That's it."

"Is that ......?"

"He said that was it."

I didn't have to explain why I was cross-dressing, it was just something I was embarrassed to talk about.

What the hell do you want from me? Why is this question even important?

"What the hell....... why are you doing this to me?"

"I was just wondering what you thought of temple life."

"......Yes?"

No way.

He wanted to know if she had abandoned the identity and majesty of a demon and dressed up for her personal hobbies and desires?

Are you wondering if I'm serious about temple life or not?

Somehow.

I don't know the details.

Me, or rather, cross-dressing and stuff, which has given the Black Order the idea that I'm probably not that dangerous.

He's a demon, but he's a cross-dressing pervert, so I don't think he's too dangerous.

With this feeling?

If that's the case, that's a good thing.

Why.......

You feel like a dog, don't you?

360

And because the questions I get are so bizarre.

It was supposed to be heavy, but it just didn't feel that way. It still felt more like a student and a teacher than a demon and a Black Order member.

But we can't talk about this forever.

"Before I share information about Cantus Magna, there are a few things I'd like to know."

"Ask. If it's a question I can answer, I'll answer it."

"You're not a wizard, are you?"

EpinHauser.

He's not a wizard.

So the first Black Order I encountered, the one that showed up right after I killed Aaron Mede, would not be Mr. Effinghauser.

It may or may not have been Ms. Effinghauser at the cross-dressing contest.

The wizard is Mr. Mustang, the teacher of Class B.

It's not like Mr. A is in the Black Order and Mr. Mustang is in Cantus Magna, right?

If you're not a wizard, why are you in a magic coven?

"There's no reason you have to be a wizard."

Dr. Effinghauser could only reply. I don't know what the conditions of membership in the Black Order are.

But the last one, Aaron Mede, was just a mere mere mere mere mere mere mere mere mere mere mere mere mere mere mere mere mere mere mere. If the Black Order has ranks, I don't know where Dr. Epinhauser falls on the scale, but he's certainly not one of them since he came in contact with me with his face exposed.

"Cantus Magna and the Black Order are....... What is the relationship?"

"Cantus Magna wants the Order's sobriety, which is why he is so relentless in his search for us."

"Is there actually a fight going on?"

"Yes, the history of knowledge between the Order and the Cantus Magna goes back a long way."

The battle between Cantus Magna and the Black Order was long and drawn out, with the latter coveting sobriety for a long time.

That would mean that Cantus Magna would be in a position to raid the Black Order.

The Black Order was known for its negative image of using evil and dangerous magic, while the Cantus Magna was known for its positive image of being the sobriety hunters who raided mages who practiced such sobriety.

Of course, it's true that the Black Order does indeed possess dangerous magic, and it's true that Cantus Magna raids them, so it's not like there's a lot of misinformation out there.

It's just that they don't realize that what Cantus Magna is doing is nothing short of robbery for the Black Order.

As such, it has become one of the Black Order's aspirations to find and destroy the home of the Cantus Magna, the organization that salivates over their sobriety.

"So, what do we know about Cantus Magna?"

"That's why they collect sobriety."

With that, Effinghauser stops walking and stares at me.

"Their goal is to complete an artifact called Akasha."

"......."

Since Antirrhinus had this information, the Black Order may have already known about it.

He stares at me, and says something short.

"......Akashara. I've never heard of you."

Mr. Effinghauser nodded in silence.

It was clear that the Black Order had no knowledge of this information.

This raises another question.

Even the Black Order, which has been at odds with Cantus Magna for a very long time, was unaware of Cantus Magna's true intentions until now.

Antirrhinus spoke as if he had been in and out of the Cantus Magna briefly.

If Antirrhinus was able to learn of Akasha's existence from his short time in the world, it makes no sense that the Black Order, even as an enemy, would not know by now.

Antirrhinus may have been active in the Cantus Magna for longer than he himself says.

"Where did you get that information?"

Dr. Epinhauser asks.

If Antirrhinus had been active in the Cantus Magna for a long time, he may have hunted the Black Order in the name of the Cantus Magna.

Soon.

Even if it was decades or centuries ago, Antirrhinus would still be considered an enemy to be destroyed by the Black Order.

If the source of your information is someone who was an insider at Cantus Magna, they might want to kill you.

"Sorry, we can't reveal that."

It was an uneasy partnership to say the least.

"If you can't be sure of the source, the information is less reliable."

"I don't think it's entirely accurate either."

After all, it's possible that Antirrhinus lied to me, and he's not exactly a great man, so it's not impossible that the story about Akasha is a lie.

"However, I do know that Cantus Magna's purpose is to complete an artifact called Akasha. I'm told it's an artifact intended to contain magic, and I don't know what happens to it when it's finished. But it can't be anything out of the ordinary, and among the many magics it contains, there may be something I want, at least that's what I'm thinking."

I don't know what Akasha is specifically, so it's a bit of a stretch. But given that the Black Order doesn't know about Akasha either, it's clear that Cantus Magna has kept its secrets well for a very long time.

Except you missed the one blotch: Antirrhinus.

"Hmmm....... That's completely unexpected and needs to be verified."

Dr. Effinghauser says so.

"I don't know about all kinds of ancient artifacts, either, so I'll see if the Order has any information about them."

Eppinhauser is actually a member of the Order, but he's not a mage himself, so wherever the Order's headquarters are, there's bound to be more information there.

"Does the Order know of any way to contact Cantus Magna?"

"If I knew the easy way out, I wouldn't have contacted you."

This was an expected answer, so I wasn't too disappointed.

"They've found us, and we've found them, but they haven't found our core, and we haven't found theirs."

There may have been small skirmishes, skirmishes and fights, but no all-out war.

Cantus Magna would love to raid the Black Order's headquarters, steal all their magic, and stuff it into Akasha.

And the Black Order would love to raid such a Cantus Magna home base and wipe them out.

But that hasn't happened so far.

"You've heard rumors of the Black Order practicing evil black magic or conducting experiments."

"Yes."

No way.

"It's a rumor, spread by the Order to attract Cantus Magna to a region or place."

It turns out that all the crazy rumors about the Black Order are actually made up by the Black Order.

In other words, they framed themselves to kill their enemies.

The Black Order was willing to do things to tarnish the Order's image in order to destroy its enemies.

So the Black Order was actually just trying to attract Cantus Magna by spreading bizarre rumors about their invented sobriety, but they didn't actually massacre civilians or anything?

"So you're saying you didn't actually use sobriety or anything?"

"Of course, in order to catch them, there has to be magic being practiced in the place that they don't know about. They don't bite on just any bait, of course, and the results are both successful and unsuccessful, but in the end we were unable to reach their core."

Effinghauser stares at the trees.

"Of course, I'm not going to say that there aren't human casualties that the Order has caused. Any sobriety must come with sacrifice....... But I don't see any reason to excuse you for that."

Eppinhauser thought it odd that he should be crying over the loss of life of a demon who had infiltrated the Insei.

No.

It's so ridiculous that you're treating cross-dressing like it's evil now.

Anyway, we don't know what the real purpose of the Black Order is.

But it's clear that the Black Order's tiresome struggle with Cantus Magna has made the destruction of Cantus Magna one of its most important aspirations, aside from its true purpose.

This one wasn't much different from Antony's.

Fish for cantus magna with sobriety as bait.

There's also the cooperation of the Black Order, which has long fought Cantus Magna.

"They're not going to take every bait, and if your goal is for them to complete an artifact, you don't want to put out a bait that's too big and end up with them completing the artifact."

We must also assume that Cantus Magna's raids were not dealt with.

Unless you know what Akasha is, you're setting up a very large bait that they're bound to fall for, and then failing, which can lead to even more unexpected results.

"Well, for now, it looks like we need to figure out what Akasha is."

Working with the Vampire Council.

We also established a working relationship with the Black Order.

It was a bit of a shock to learn that the Order's representative was Mr. Effinghauser.

Every situation has its own anxiety, but it's starting to come together in the way I want it to.

My identity is no longer a mystery to me. I had no choice but to expose myself in order to reach out to so many groups.

Dr. Effinghauser watches me steadily.

"Reinhardt."

Reinhardt, not Valier.

Of course, he doesn't know that the Devil's son is named Bali, the same as the original Devil, so he calls him that.

Mr. Effinghauser looks at me and says, "You're right.

I don't know what emotions he's feeling in those emotionless eyes.

Except he called me Reinhardt, not the Devil's son.

"Don't make foolish choices."

With those words, I saw a lot of emotion in his face.

What's a stupid choice? If it's a stupid choice, I think I'm already doing it.

He seemed to think I was still his student.

We don't know what EpinHauser wants, or what the Black Order wants.

I don't even know what you want from me.

However.

Because he still treated me as a student.

"Yes, sir."

I treated him, too, as a teacher, still.

\* \* \*

The link to the Black Order is Dr. Effinghauser.

We don't know how he communicates with the order or what he actually does.

The setup I wrote is true, but the parts I didn't write are filled with things I don't know.

Mr. Effinghauser is a patriot.

It is unclear whether or not that attribute of the Patriots is related to the Black Order.

However, the Black Order can never be an anti-Imperial organization. My description of Dr. Effinghauser as a patriot would be true.

But why would a pro-imperial organization keep me alive? Is it because they think my existence somehow benefits the empire?

For now, it was clear that they were very cautious about touching me. I was not yet on the radar of the Black Order, as they would rather work with me to destroy Cantus Magna.

Mr. Effinghauser's advice: don't do anything stupid.

That in itself could be interpreted as saying that my behavior will change the Black Order's actions or attitude toward me.

Mr. Effinghauser will report to the Order's headquarters or something like that about Akasha, and if he can find a clue about it, he will.

If you don't have it, bait the Black Order's gold or your gold to draw Cantus Magna.

I can organize a withdrawal of such magnitude that they will have no choice but to take it. It will be close to all-out war.

Either the Black Order and my factions get smashed, or Cantus Magna gets smashed.

One of two things will happen, and Akasha's whereabouts will be determined then.

Time passes.

In anxiety and impatience.

\* \* \*

"Are you feeling a little weird lately?"

I was on vacation," said Liana de Granz, who was staying in her dorm for a few days, then going to the Duke for a few days, then repeating.

"What."

"I'm usually a little off-kilter, but lately I've been feeling a little....... Hmmm......."

Riana looks at me, crosses her arms, and mutters.

"It's like water on wine. It's like water on wine."

It's not the kind of analogy you'd make at your age, but it's not too far-fetched for Riana, who I'm sure is sipping her drink in the corner of the house.

"Maybe I'm just tired."

"Really? It's vacation, what's the big deal, get some rest."

"I'll take care of it."

"Well, whatever."

Riana would say that, and then she would go somewhere. Not necessarily because of training. Not that she doesn't do it.

Anxiety that one day this life will end.

Because of this, my recent behavior has seemed a bit odd.

"......what did you ask?"

"No, just."

You're staring at Ellen's face while doing nothing in training.

"What, what's with the sudden....... You have something to say?"

"Huh? No?"

"No, you scared me, ah......."

You're talking to Harriet at the Society of Magical Research mansion, and suddenly you tap her on the shoulder and she freaks out.

"Reinhardt. Let's go on a date!"

"Sure."

"......?"

"Where are you going?"

"Uh, ah. Huh? Ah, Gee, I'll think about it now!"

Or saying yes when Olivia says something out of the blue that I would normally say no to.

Even if I think.

I was being a bit of a screw up.

Episode 361.

Reinhardt is weird.

"Right?"

"Yes."

"So."

"Me, I'm well......."

Ellen, Liana, Harriet, and Adelia were sitting around talking about it.

Reinhardt has been a little off lately.

I wouldn't necessarily call it a bad feeling. Herriot says, blushing.

"Well, the other day, all of a sudden, I just got....... He, I don't know what to say. He was looking at me, you know, like....... He looked at me like......."

"Feel?"

"Yeah, that's what it felt like!"

At Liana's words, Herriot exclaimed, as if that was the answer.

Reinhardt always defaults to a sour expression.

But the other day, I noticed something strange about Reinhardt.

He walks around with a wistful look in his eyes like he's seen the world.

There hasn't been any unnecessary bickering for days.

It's kind of a wistful, coy look.

Of course, there is an axis that is ashamed to look at itself with such eyes. Like Herriot de Saint-Ouen.

Some people touch your forehead and ask if you're sick. Like Ellen Artorius.

Of course, some people are completely different.

"I feel bad."

Liana de Granz is on the freak out side.

"No, I was at home the other night and I had a few drinks and I was feeling sick, and all of a sudden he's like, 'Don't drink too much, you're going to get diabetes.' What am I supposed to say? Huh? This, this, this....... Anyway, I've never felt so dirty in my life."

I've been hanging around.

Riana was stunned and disgusted that the man who had spoken so harshly to her had suddenly spoken so kindly to her.

"Crazy, why is he doing this all of a sudden?

"He's just worried.

When she frowns, Reinhard pours himself another drink. Riana's face turns pale and she mumbles something incoherent.

"That asshole....... I heard that people die when they suddenly change."

"There's no such thing!"

"It's superstition."

"Well, no......."

Riana's words sparked reactions all over the room.

I know Reinhardt's been weird lately, but no one knows what's killing the grass.

"Should I do something....... for you?"

Riana merely shook her head and said so, which prompted Ellen to ask.

"What if?"

"Well....... When I'm feeling down, I wonder what else I can do besides eat and drink......."

If you're going to do it to a dead guy for no apparent reason, what else is there to do?

Even Riana, who's freaking out, is worried about Reinhardt after all.

Everyone starts to think about doing something for Reinhardt, who is completely dead.

Aside from whether or not that would really help Reinhardt.

\* \* \*

I've long felt that I have too much on my plate. Of course, I thought it would only get worse from there, but when the pressure really started to set in, it became overwhelming to pay attention to everything.

The Black Order has said they're on my side for now, but I don't know what their true intentions are.

Perhaps it's better to leave the temple on your own.

As Lucinil says, I will become more and more dangerous, and more and more people will learn of my identity. And it's likely to be irreversible, depending on who knows.

If you're going to walk a dangerous tightrope, why not just leave the temple?

However, there were reasons to stay in the temple, even if it meant hiding my identity as much as possible until I could.

"It's only been a few days, so I don't know, but it seems to be going well."

"Good."

Class B dormitory.

Charlotte said, calmly sipping her black tea.

Analyzes and researches the art of betrothal. Uses it to remove the demonic spirit from Charlotte.

Until then, I'm the only one who can handle Charlotte's power when it gets out of hand.

Even aside from these practical issues, I realize that there is a part of me that doesn't want to leave the Temple, but at the end of the day, that's just my own personal desires and greed.

"For now, I've kept the details of the Labyrinth Underground of Demon Castle and where the book came from a secret. It may come out in the future, but for now, no one knows."

The Labyrinth of the Demon Castle's Underground.

It doesn't matter that the location is known.

However, the problem is that only Archdemons can go in there. If it's known that Charlotte is now a demon, she won't be safe.

I want to stay in the temple until Charlotte's issue is resolved.

I'm not sure if it will or not.

"By the way, what's going on with you lately, did you have a fight with the kids or......?"

"Huh? No?"

"Hmmm."

I even asked Charlotte cautiously if she sensed something in my appearance. Being too out of character can also be a problem.

I froze slightly, and Charlotte held my hand still.

"Don't worry, everything will be fine."

That's kind of what I was saying to Charlotte.

I suddenly realized that I wished Charlotte had been given a sign.

\* \* \*

Winter Palace.

Bertus's office.

"I knew this was going to happen, but it's going to be a mystery."

Bertus organized the reports and placed them neatly beside the table.

The Leverier-Lanche case.

We have been able to identify the raiders, but their whereabouts are mysterious. The demon's intentions were also unknown. The report I received now said that they would continue to investigate the events of Levereer Ranze, but that they had reached their limits.

The Devil's successor does exist.

And it's very likely that it was the same boy who saved Charlotte. Where did that boy go?

The boy who disappeared as if he had suddenly evaporated in the middle of the ecliptic.

Charlotte tracked it down herself, but never found it.

For now, the reappearance of the Demon is working in the Empire's favor, but without knowing what it is, there's nothing to like about the reappearance of a vaguely vanished enemy of the Empire.

Where to start to reach the demonic remnants.

That was a problem for Bertus.

"But degradation. You know, that....... Reinhardt."

"Shut up."

Bertus' brow furrowed at the mention of Reinhardt's name.

"Don't talk about him for a while."

We all have memories from our lives that are damaging just to recall.

That's what the name Reinhardt meant to Bertus right now.

Female.

No. Why? What's wrong with you?

There is no reason, no rationale, no justification for Reinhardt to do what he did.

I know they say it's about the money, but that's not a lot of money for a pageant. In reality, Rotary clubs are raking in the money, so how much of it is going to help the club's coffers?

So literally.

There's no good reason in Bertus's mind to do that, other than because he wants to.

Reinhardt cross-dressed.

Why?

because I want to.

That's the only reason I can think of!

To Bertus, Reinhardt is that kind of guy.

The guy who cross-dressed and went to a convention to show it off.

"......."

It's easy for people to give up on understanding things that are outside of their scope.

Bertus had given up trying to understand Reinhardt.

When I give up, it means I've stopped wondering, stopped thinking about it.

As he was told to end his investigation of the silver-haired girl immediately, Bertus tried not to think about the madman named Reinhardt.

In this situation, Bertus' waiver of cause against Reinhardt is a win for Reinhardt.

"That....... But I thought it was something you should know about, so I've added......."

"I said don't talk about it."

Bertus had suffered so much mental damage that he wasn't even going to lay down in his dorm room until after winter break.

When it was clear that the emperor was uncomfortable, the subordinate stammered.

As if it was something I couldn't say and wouldn't be able to back out of.

"Well, let me just say this."

"Huh, okay, what is it?"

Bertus's demeanor made it clear that he was prepared to be reprimanded for anything less, and the subordinate spoke with difficulty.

"They say you have received an imperial crest."

"......Hmm?"

Bertus shook his head.

It was an unexpected comment.

An imperial coat of arms?

"You mean ...... Reinhardt received? The imperial coat of arms? By whom? My brother?"

Bertus knew that Charlotte had lent her imperial crest to Reinhardt on his way to the Darklands.

"No. His Majesty himself gave it to me......."

"......Your Majesty?"

Imperial Coat of Arms.

Given by the emperor himself means it's not a loan, it's a sergeant.

Those who possess it are treated like royalty.

That's just the way it is, and just having it gives you immunity from most of the biggies.

There are no hard and fast laws about how royalty should be treated.

Therefore, being treated like royalty means that you deserve to be treated better than all the privileged people in the world.

As such, the imperial coat of arms cannot be received or carried by just anyone, and those who bear it must have done great service to the empire.

In other words, they're already out of this world.

Lagan Artorius and his band of warriors.

And that's what Reinhardt received.

"Last time, didn't you invite students to the palace in connection with the Temple Festival?"

"Oh, yeah. It's an annual event."

It's nothing special, it happens every year. Every year, the winners of Temple's grade level tournaments are invited to the event to be recognized and encouraged.

Reinhardt is a first-year Temple winner.

"You can't possibly be there......."

"Yes. Not only Reinhardt, but Ellen Artorius is said to have received the imperial coat of arms."

"Ellen? I thought she didn't go to the tournament this time?"

"This time they invited the winners of the Miss and Mr. Temple contest."

"Hmmm. I see."

Bertus was too busy with other things at the time to care, so he didn't know that Ellen had just been crowned Miss Temple.

Bertus could see a picture being painted.

Miss and Mr. Temple contest winners don't usually get invited to the palace.

The Emperor knew Ellen was the winner and invited her on purpose. To give her an imperial coat of arms.

"I can understand Ellen, but....... Reinhardt?"

Ellen Artorius.

She's the sister of a warrior, she's talented, and she's growing at a frightening rate. In a world where the Devil may have returned, Ellen is the most important person in the Empire to protect and nurture.

If you think about it from that perspective, Ellen being given an imperial coat of arms is a pretty important and good decision by the Emperor.

But Reinhardt?

Bertus thinks Reinhardt is a fearsome talent, too.

In terms of speed, she can actually outrun Ellen. Their starting points are vastly different, and now they both have access to magical enhancements, though their skills are not equal.

But at this point, Ellen has a great precedent in Ragan Artorius as her brother, so she's expected to do more than that, and there are plenty of people in the Empire who are better than Ellen and Reinhardt.

I'm all for investing in possibilities, but being given an imperial coat of arms is a bit much if you don't have the backstory of being the sister of a warrior.

"They say you're the owner of Tiamata."

"......what?"

Tiamata.

At that, Bertus narrowed his eyes.

"Is this the Tiamata I know, the Relic of Tuan?"

"Example. Reinhardt is......."

The subordinate says still.

"Champion of Tuan."

Champion of Tuan.

Reinhardt was the champion of Tuan.

Bertus's mouth hung open, shocked in a different way than he had ever been before.

"Since when?"

"I don't know, because this just came in......."

Master of Tiamata.

Champion of Tuan.

Apostle of the God of Purity.

Pure.

And.

Female.

"No, I mean, what the hell are you doing cross-dressing for?"

"......Yes?"

Bertus's rapid-fire tirade caused his subordinate to take a step back in horror.

Pure and cross-dressing.

Bertus could not help but be convinced that Reinhardt was even crazier than he had thought. Bertus pressed his temples, which had begun to burn, and sighed heavily.

"No. Anyway, Reinhardt is the champion of Tuan, not sure when."

"Yes, Your Majesty, and that's why I'm joining Ellen Artorius as the Demon King's adversary....... I have been granted an imperial crest, or so I believe."

"That could happen. That could happen......."

There is one scene that Bertus wants to get out of his head by putting his brain in a cleaning solution and rubbing it out.

I force myself to think about it.

Reinhardt is a pervert, that's for sure, but he's also a champion of Tuan.

Putting aside thoughts about things that don't matter. I'd like to put it away forever, but it doesn't work that way.

Anyway, Reinhard is the champion of Tuan. That's why he and Ellen received the imperial crest.

Bertus knows that Ellen is the owner of Ramen.

But I didn't realize that Reinhardt was a champion of Tuan until now.

"Last year, he and Ellen brought back what they believed to be a demonic holy object from the Darklands, didn't they?"

"Yes, if you mean that thing that suddenly disappeared......."

Reinhardt had brought back a powerful artifact from the Darklands during his summer vacation last year, believed to be a demonic holy relic.

Then, just as he was about to investigate further, the Dettomorian performed some sort of magical ritual and suddenly disappeared.

"Isn't it a bit of a stretch to think that Reinhardt being a demonic relic or something has something to do with him being Tuan's champion?"

"That's....... I'm not sure, Your Majesty."

The idea that a holy object can be corrupted is something that is hard to believe unless you've seen it with your own eyes.

If the object and Reinhardt's acquisition of Tiamata are connected, it means that some time has passed since Reinhardt became champion of Tuan.

"So you've been keeping it a secret that you were a champion of Tuan all this time......."

I get it.

The owner of a relic tends to attract unnecessary attention, which is why Ellen hides the fact that she's the warrior's sister and the owner of the ramen.

Since Reinhardt is so close to Ellen, I think it's fair to say that he's been hiding his ownership of Tiamata all this time.

In the end, it's too vague at this point to say whether Reinhardt became Tuan's champion before or after he entered Temple. We can only assume that it was sometime around summer vacation.

But.

The real point to think about is elsewhere.

He hadn't realized that Reinhardt was the owner of Tiamata until now, and it's a well-hidden secret.

"Your Majesty, how on earth did you come to know that Reinhardt was the champion of Tuan......."

It is unlikely that Reinhard would have confessed to the Emperor himself.

Apparently, the emperor had correctly identified Reinhard and Ellen and awarded them imperial coats of arms.

How.

How the Emperor knew what Reinhardt would not have said, and bestowed upon him the imperial coat of arms.

"Hmmm, and definitely a bit unusual."

Bertus clenches his jaw and mutters.

"Tiamata is an object famous for not falling into the hands of unbelievers."

"......Yes."

The Tiamata was a holy object that only a paladin or priest of Tuan could recognize as its owner. Reinhardt, however, is not particularly religious, nor does he have the personality for such things.

"I wonder if Olivia Ranze, who is close to Reinhardt, is more worthy of the title. If there's not much difference between a man who has renounced his faith and a man who has no faith, I wonder if it's better that way......."

Isn't Olivia Ranze, a devotee of Tuan and a holy woman so powerful that she's been called a saint, a more fitting champion of Tuan?

Bertus thinks that if he were Thuan, he would have chosen Olivia, not Reinhardt.

However, we don't know what the gods are thinking.

I'm not even sure if they really think.

In the end, all you have is the result.

Reinhardt is the Champion of Tuan, as the Emperor would not have given him an imperial coat of arms based on a rumor.

The power of purity.

It is the antithesis of corruption.

A force against darkness.

Darkness.

The power of darkness.

Shadows.

As if they were deathly afraid, they were so pathetic they weren't even worth dealing with.

The power to manipulate shadows was slowly being eroded.

His brother.

Charlotte De Gradias.

You've put everything down, and then suddenly you're back to life.

Certain moments of Charlotte's life flash through Bertus' mind.

A million thoughts jumble in Bertus's head.

"......."

Bertus stares out the window, his expression stony.

"Reinhardt, that guy, come to think of it, sometimes he emptied his temple......."

Soon, the prince smiles a sinister smile.

"The date on which my brother's condition allegedly suddenly improved."

"Date Reinhardt did not attend Temple. Time of return."

"My brother's deeds."

"Get it all collated."

At Bertus's command, the subordinate nodded.

"Yes, Your Highness."

Someone knocked on the door of Bertus' office, afraid to leave.

-Smart

"What."

-Your Majesty, Lord Saviolin Tana has requested an audience.

"Bam, no time for a break, let them in."

The crown was too big to focus on just one thing.

If you forget, your subordinates' organized materials will give you inspiration or an epiphany about something else.

Until then, you're just doing something else.

Saviolin Tana soon entered the prince's office.

As always, a stern expression, a calm demeanor, and the appearance of an elderly woman, regardless of her actual age.

The master of the chanapelle sets the example for the prince.

"His Highness the Prince."

"Welcome, Lord Tana."

Saviolin Tana looks at the prince and says.

"I was told there was something I needed to do."

"Yes, Lord Tana, this is important."

Bertus smiles, fingers crossed.

"Something very important."

Saviolin Tana stared at Bertus's smile in silence.

Episode 362.

I had one last thing left to do, and I mean one last thing.

No, it's not the end, it's the beginning, in a sense, of getting everything in place.

Temple dormitory.

Night time.

"As of yesterday, we have concluded our contact with Owen de Getmora."

Inside my room in the dorm, I was listening to Sarkegar's report.

"What do you think, are you surprised?"

"He seemed a little surprised, but he's a trader by nature, so it was like he was bouncing off the abacus."

I would have panicked if a demonic force suddenly asked to join forces with me while I was working on a republican revolution for humanity. But then he calmed down and started to calculate the situation.

"They said they'd have to discuss it with their leadership, but as you said, I think the environment is right for a positive answer."

Now that we've identified you, you're as good as captured on a leash. If you refuse to join us, all you have to do is give the Empire information about the revolutionary forces.

"Yeah, because for the Empire, the fire that fell on our feet would be the revolutionaries, not us."

The existence of demonic forces is in itself a basis for uniting humanity. But the quasi-movement of revolutionary forces is a division within.

Demonic forces can't topple empires, but revolutionary forces can.

So in reality, it's the revolutionaries, not us, that the empire is really going to light up and exterminate.

Sarkegar looks at me cautiously.

"Of course, Owen had one condition for the meeting."

"It's a condition....... What is that?"

"He wants to see that the demon's descendants are real."

"Hmmm."

It's not unexpected, they're curious about how much of our power is left and what we can do if they join forces with us.

And you'll want to make sure that the rumored final demon really exists. If I'm as powerful as Ancient Vali, I'll be pretty damn reliable.

But I don't have that kind of actual power.

"What do you think I am, an archdemon?"

"That's right."

So it shouldn't be much different when I show up.

"What do you think you should do? Obviously, we'll need to agree on where and how to meet, and I don't think you should confront him directly. It could be a trap, or it could be dangerous."

We know them, they don't know us.

Showing up and exposing your power in that situation is not a good choice.

But they'd rather have an ally than be taken advantage of.

The Black Order has already caught up with you.

"It would be risky for me to go there myself. Tell them no face-to-face until we've established a level of trust. It's not like we can work together face-to-face."

Overkill is a time for restraint.

"Okay, degradation."

Sarkegaard looks at me as if he's finished with his report.

"We decided to work with Order."

"I see."

I didn't mention that Effinghauser was a member of the Black Order, because if I did, Sarkegar would try to get me out of the Temple at all costs.

"We're still not sure what the Black Order's goals are, but they seem to agree on one thing: to bring Cantus Magna down and fight alongside us. As long as our interests align, we'll work together, if not trust each other."

"......I think it's too risky."

Sarkegar is right.

And I'm actually in more danger. Sarkeghar will be furious if he finds out I hid Eppinhauser's membership in the Black Order.

"I don't know if it's right to tie our necks around this thing called Akasha, maybe that's not what we want?"

"I suppose."

What is Akasha.

I don't know.

But you've decided to do something, so you have to do it.

The die was cast a long time ago, and we're just moving the pieces now.

If I wasn't going to move my horse, I would have been stuck in Eleris' shop in the first place, killing time in the corner of that tiny two-story house, letting all the events and mishaps, including the gate debacle, play out in silence.

"And you know I stopped by the Demon Castle this time."

"Yes degradation. Was there something there?"

"There was a shelter, and there were supplies stored that could keep them alive for a very long time."

At my words, Sarkegar stares at me blankly.

"In the basement of Demon Castle....... You mean there's such a place?"

"Yeah, I guess you don't know either."

"Yes, that's right."

"It's like a labyrinth where the path doesn't open unless you're an Archdemon."

"A mysterious labyrinth, indeed....... I suppose it's not surprising, since the Ancestral Demon King was a master of magic......."

In reality, Airi was only vaguely aware that there was such a thing as a secret room in Demon Castle.

The Four Hundred Kings must have known about the bunker. But it was a closely guarded secret. Even Airi knew about the place, but not that it was a bunker.

If you know anything about bunkers, it's the Four Horsemen, the Devil, and me.

The rest is that I didn't know about the secret chamber in the Demon Castle. Of course, it's possible that someone else does, but we don't know.

"It's a labyrinth, and I don't think you can even enter unless you're an Archdemon."

"I see......."

"Anyway, there were a bunch of grimoires in there, and I'm going to use them as bait to draw out the Cantus Magna."

Enough with the bait.

So join the Black Order and prepare to reel in the big fish that is Cantus Magna.

"Pass this along to Lucinil, so she'll know about it."

Share your findings and decide what to do next.

"Yes, degradation."

Sarkegar turns into a sparrow and flies away.

I held still, pressed my temples together, and took a few deep breaths.

Shouldn't you be meeting the revolutionaries in person?

Am I really supposed to be in the Temple when the Black Order can lay hands on me at any moment?

Surely, the elixir is the answer to Charlotte's condition?

What if you messed with the wrong cantus magna and ended up with a bigger problem?

When everything goes wrong.

Actually, I was trying to save everyone.

Who the hell is going to believe me?

\* \* \*

Four days have passed.

Nothing much has happened in the meantime. Contacts with the revolutionary forces were being approached cautiously, and no word had been received from Dr. Epinhauser.

However.

I'm pretty sure there were quite a few guys who got stepped on by me walking around as a dead man walking.

"Hey, me."

I locked myself in my room and pulled my hair out, and Riana called out to me.

It shows up when you least expect it and in a way you least expect it.

"What is it?"

"Let's go play with my sister."

I mean, he's had enough of beating up on Cliff, and now he's doing it to me?

"......Who are you?"

"Asshole, that's what I'm saying."

He grabs me by the scruff of the neck and drags me out of the room.

"Eek!"

"Come out anyway, asshole."

He thinks there are no worries and all he has to do is have fun.

She's a rich girl, but she's also like a rich girl and not like a rich girl at all.

Liana De Granz.

"A drink?"

"You and I aren't old enough to ask each other out for drinks like it's a given, are we?"

"I thought you were screaming your head off about that last time."

Somehow.

It's comforting to see someone like Riana, who doesn't seem to have a problem with this kind of behavior.

The time is still afternoon.

Riana says, dragging me along.

"Anyway, give me a minute."

"What are you going to do?"

"We need to talk."

Riana smirks at me.

"I don't know why you're a killer, but I know a lot of kids who get tired when you're a killer."

-Pak-Pak!

Riana pats me on the shoulder.

"You're not going to die with a frown on your face."

It doesn't mean you can't wear it.

I mean, you can walk around with a frown on your face.

"Right."

I smirked, and she clicked her tongue at me.

"I bet the pig that's being led to the slaughter tomorrow doesn't look like you."

"A little harsh?"

"Yeah, come out like this. It's more familiar."

When I looked like I was about to lose my temper, Riana giggled and patted me on the back.

Liana De Granz.......

Always so far away and yet so close.

It's a weird one.

\* \* \*

You said you had time.

Riana led me outside the temple.

"Where are you going?"

"Follow me."

He even dragged me on a horsepower train.

Come to think of it, there weren't that many times I was alone with him.

The first time I spoke to Riana was on a group mission to a deserted island, and after that, I didn't really feel like we were close, but after the summer vacation, I felt like we had a casual relationship.

There are not many events or things that have accumulated, so to speak, but it was a strange relationship that somehow became close and we didn't feel uncomfortable with each other at all.

A relationship where you can call each other friends without hesitation.

I think it is.

On a horse-drawn train, not very crowded, but not unoccupied either, you grip the handle and stare blankly out the window.

Scenes similar to Seoul, but never the same as Seoul, pass by.

Although the process of getting on the train was the same, the scenery of Hwangdo didn't look anything like the Seoul in my head.

On a rocking train.

"What's wrong?"

Liana de Granz asks, holding still.

I could feel his concern for me in his simple words.

There's a lot going on. I just can't tell you what it is.

"Everything's fine."

"Yeah. Because that's what people do for no reason."

He didn't look too convinced, but he didn't pry. Riana was silent for a moment, trying to find another topic, but then she spoke.

"Now the juniors are coming in."

"......Yes."

I was so focused on the problem at hand that I wasn't thinking about it at all.

We're in our second year, and soon the freshmen will be joining the royal class.

There are quite a few guys in the junior class who played roles in the original, and I don't think my behavior would have affected that, so they'll get into the Royal Class as normal. Though they'll mostly be associated with Ludwig.

Of course, even there, there's a feeling of being divided into freshman A and B classes, replicating the knowledge among seniors.

Junior.

Thinking about it, it's actually a bit of a departure from temples.

"If only there weren't more juniors like you."

"......What's wrong with me?"

"Do you think it's good to have a junior who's going to give the senior who came to teach you discipline a double whammy?"

"Ah."

Thinking about it, it's kind of mind-numbing.

A junior like me comes in?

Worst.

Riana looks at me and asks.

"What would you do if Harriet got a group of juniors together to talk about this and that, and they were all crying about where the hell is the discipline?"

Uh.

That's it.

Uh.......

"......."

"You're not going to let him get away with it, are you? You're not going to jump up and down like that senior who paraded you around the other day?"

I can't say no!

I insulted Redina, who was there to discipline the juniors, and she smirked and said we'll see, and then brought in Ard, a sophomore, and I got beat up by Ard and narrowly escaped with a gut-breaker.

But now that I'm a sophomore.

We're not going to boss you around.

Say, for example, that the junior asshole talked smack to the senior asshole.

If she sees that and she's freaking out and crying and telling me that this happened.

'A junior sent me.......'

If you say something like that.

I'm not sure I can make it out of that dough.

Ard de Gritis.......

You.......

It was worth it.......

It wasn't until a year later that I understood what the man who parachuted me in was thinking.

I'm confident I could do worse, not better.......

Who do you think you are, my dear? She looks like this, but she's a princess.

It's disgusting and annoying when it happens, and I'm not sure I wouldn't do it myself if the situation called for it!

As if reading my expression and knowing what I was thinking, Riana giggled.

"It's funny, though, when you think about it. I thought you were such a crazy person when you were doing all that crazy stuff at the beginning of last year....... and here you are."

I literally had no reason to be friends with him, but after everything that happened, I did. I don't think Riana ever thought she'd be able to take a walk outside with a scowl like mine.

Riana looks out the window and smiles thinly.

"This was fun."

"......."

"I hope it's the same this year."

As Riana says, "We had a lot of fun last year, so we want to have a lot of fun this year.

"......Yes."

I hope so, too.

\* \* \*

It didn't take me long to figure out where the heck Riana was going to take me after the magic train ride.

A cluster of mansions in the northern ecliptic.

Even there, in front of the gates of a very large mansion, Riana stopped.

"Of course, this is your house, isn't it?"

"I know."

There.

What the hell does my seemingly depressed mood have to do with you inviting me over?

Riana smirked.

"Now, slowly, I have to ask permission."

"Permission? Permission for what?"

"Marriage."

"Uh, no, no. What?"

"What, you don't like it?"

What the fuck is this guy talking about?

Is that how you've been looking at me all this time?

"Uh, well, ah....... No, because I don't understand what you're talking about, and I'm sorry......."

"...... Just kidding, you can't be serious."

Riana clicked her tongue in disbelief and kicked him, and then a blue lightning bolt shot out of his hair.

-Physics!

"Also, is it a little annoying that you're being so polite?"

"No, no, no, don't pull this shit!"

"Shut up."

Riana crossed her arms as if her pride had been bruised by the unnecessary prank, and before long, the manor's doors were opened by its occupants.

"Welcome, ma'am."

"Yes."

"They're all waiting for you in the outbuilding."

Wait.

Who?

"Follow me."

Riana took my arm and led the way through the sprawling mansion.

"You should count yourself blessed, asshole."

Riana yelled something unintelligible as she dragged me away.

Episode 363.

The Duke of Granz Manor.

As soon as I walked into the outbuilding, rather than the main house, I was amazed.

First, the dining room of the outbuilding was filled with delicious smells.

Naturally, there was tons of food on the table.

But it wasn't the food that mattered.

"There you go."

Ellen.

"......."

Herriot.

"Wow, you're here......."

Adelia.

"Uh, um....... Hey, Reinhardt."

And Klippmann.

"This is all....... What is it?"

Not understanding the situation, Riana poked me in the side with her elbow.

"What the heck, you looked like you were in a bad mood, so I thought I'd do something for you, and then I said, "Let's go party.""

Well, food is food.

Everyone was wearing aprons, and the food seemed to be homemade.

It looks like I'm in a bad mood, but it doesn't tell me why.

So you want to console him somehow, but you don't know what to do, so you organize a surprise party or something.

It doesn't solve the problem, and it doesn't relieve my psychological anxiety about the task at hand.

The more I see these guys thinking like this, the more I fear for the future.

This is not useful for anything.

Because the better the present, the scarier the future.

This is the last thing I need.

Because there will come a day when you'll miss this moment.

"Uh....... Are you crying?"

Riana's shaky voice echoed through the dining room, breaking the silence.

He sounded genuinely confused, and the other kids looked at me, mouths agape.

"Crazy, what are you talking about, what did I cry about?"

"Oh, no....... You asshole, are you really crying?"

Riana fussed over what she'd seen.

Not the kids.

I'm way past the age of shedding a tear over something like this.

"I'm not crying!"

Would I cry!

They're not going to cry because you threw them a surprise party!

How old do you think I am in real life?

"......this."

Ellen walked over to me and held out a tissue.

No, I'm not crying, so why do I need this?

"You're not crying?"

I didn't cry.

I don't even know what came out of my eyes.

I don't know.

"Yeah, this because I know you're not crying."

Eventually,

Ellen takes the tissue she offers.

"Fuck......."

Something.

I wasn't defeated, but I felt defeated.

And.

There is such a thing.

A child who doesn't understand English and cries along when someone cries.

"black......."

"No....... You, why are you crying?"

"Oooh....... I don't know......."

Herriot suddenly cried along, causing Riana to freeze up for the second time.

"This."

"Ugh, ugh....... Black......."

Ellen handed out tissues to Harriet as well.

\* \* \*

I didn't cry, but Harriet did. I believe so.

Of course, the kids think differently, but that's none of my business.

So in the end, it was a surprise party, but it was a sumptuous feast, so you're supposed to eat it.

It was never like a social party, with musicians playing songs and dancing.

Apparently, Riana doesn't like that kind of thing. I tried to imagine Riana dancing at a social party in a dress, but it didn't work out.

I'm guessing you're going to sit cross-legged and glare at the guys who come up to you and tell them to get lost.

Of course, we don't know what that would look like in practice.

There was plenty of food available.

Ellen, we learned last week that you can cook, but it was a surprise to see you do it with Harriet, Adelia, and now Cliff.

"Did you get dragged to ......?"

"......said they might be short-handed."

Apparently, Cliffman was given the name by Riana.

You've become a slave to Riana.

If it's actually a reward and you like it, I don't know, but if you really don't like it and you're being forced to do it, isn't this bullying?

No.

Calling it bullying is kind of funny at this point.

The question is, who made what?

-Omnomnomnom

It's Ellen, and I can't tell because she's eating whatever is in front of her.

-Cringe!

It's obvious what she's made. She watches me closely to see what I touch, and when I do, she looks at me expectantly.

But it's pretty interesting.

Creamy pasta in front of you.

From the looks of it, it must have been written by Herriot.

But honestly.

Because at a time like this, a character like you should definitely not be cooking.

Because it looks good, but it's actually sugar instead of salt, or something like that, right?

Eventually, I closed my eyes and took a bite because I knew I'd be disappointed if I didn't.

"What do you think? What do you think?"

Herriot asked, turning a color I was afraid to eat.

What is it?

Why not just be delicious?

It's not a huge delicacy, but thinking it was made by Herriot made it seem more delicious than it actually was because of the quirk correction.

"......Why is it delicious?"

Her eyes narrowed at my words.

"What the hell, if it's delicious, it's delicious, what do you mean it's delicious?"

"No, why do you think you know how to cook?"

"I just followed the recipe in the cookbook."

a.

Are you really saying that if you follow the recipe like a ruler, it can't be bad?

That's an honors student approach to cooking. In fact, thinking about it made me wonder if it's not possible for her to not be able to cook.

But this is the first time I've ever seen him do this. He's got some serious cooking talent, doesn't he?

The different types of food felt different.

This is pretty good, but Ellen did everything she wanted to do.

Pretty much everything I wanted to do was done by Herriot.

"......."

"......."

Some things were just plain tasteless.

"Well, it's my first time....... It's my first time, so......."

"No, this is the way it's supposed to be the first time. I don't think you're bad at it."

The Yoritsu property was taken by Adelia. No, it's not even a yoritsu. It's weird that she's so good at it.

Cliffman seems to have been in charge of preparing the ingredients and doing all sorts of odds and ends.

Eventually, the hearty meal came to an end.

"Anyway, thanks guys."

I expressed my honest gratitude for the fact that they had all gotten together to do this for a guy like me who was depressed.

\* \* \*

The party didn't end there, though; we were at the Duchy of Granz anyway, and there were plenty of empty rooms, so we nodded our heads in agreement.

I don't have a particularly busy day right now, so I had plenty of time.

It's not the main house, it's an outbuilding, but it's almost as good as the main house.

Riana's thinking is obvious.

It's clear that you're trying to get the kids to drink too much tonight. It's broad daylight and people are watching, so it's not the right time yet, but it's clear they're looking for an opportunity.

It's also clear that they put us in the outbuilding to avoid the attention of the occupants and their families in the main house.

Of course, that doesn't happen until later in the evening.

"But it's winter break, and I want to go somewhere."

Riana muttered, filing her nails as she lay on her back with a slash across Cliffman's thigh.

Cliffman was frozen, unable to move.

At first glance, it should seem exciting and sweet.

Riana seems to think it's just a pillow substitute.

"Hey, man."

"Uh, uh, uh......."

Blushing, Cliffman stammered, unable to make eye contact with Riana as she looked up and called out to him.

"Do you want to go somewhere?"

"Me, me, me?!"

"So did I ask you or someone else?"

"That, that, that. That, that, that......."

"......No, why are you panicking?"

Riana looks up at Cliff and smirks.

"Oh, I thought you two were going to go?"

"Oh, no?! No, no. Ah, no. No. De?"

"Sneaky. Why, you want to go out with me, eh?"

"Oh, no, no, no, no!"

"What, no, no, no, now?"

"Oh, that, no, not......."

"Okay, you want to go out together?"

"Sa, help me....... My, my, I did everything wrong......."

Riana giggles at Cliffman's white-faced declaration of surrender, and Harriet is frozen in place as she watches. Herriot pats me on the shoulder and whispers in a low voice.

"Riana is a little....... Sometimes I see....... You know......."

"That's bad."

Her eyes widened at my words.

I wanted to say no, but he didn't end up saying no, so he seemed to agree with me strongly.

Adelia couldn't look at him with her eyes open, her face turning bright red.

-Omnomnomnom

Whether Ellen realized it or not, all she could think about was the macarons.

Aside from the prank she pulled on Klippmann, Riana did seem to want to go out before winter break ended.

Suddenly, there was a discussion about where to go for winter vacation.

As the conversation progressed, it was interesting to see that only Cliff, the human stutterer, reacted the most. It was more of a stutter, but he was the second most talkative after Riana.

As the story progressed, I honestly wasn't sure if I could go along, so I stepped outside to listen. In the name of taking a walk.

The fact that we are here as guests means that we have already reported to Duke Granz and are free to roam.

By the way.

Am I too much?

I'm at a friend's house, and it's polite to say hello to her parents.

Is that some kind of proof that I'm not completely out of Confucianism?

I'm not going to go out of my way to say hello to Duke Granz, because that would be ridiculous.

I wandered around the garden of the mansion, near the outbuildings.

It was winter, so there were no flowers, just a well-groomed shrubbery hedge.

To be able to have a mansion of this size on the Imperial Road was a reminder of the financial and power of the Dukes of Granz.

It's not like I don't have a daughter who spends money like Riana, and I have unlimited support.

If you think about it, in the original and now in our grade, those with strong backgrounds are almost all in the A class.

Bertus de Gradias.

Liana De Granz.

Herriot de Saint-Ouen.

Heinrich von Schwarz.

Erich is a nobleman, of course, but not a very powerful one.

Class B, on the other hand, has only one member of the nobility, Anna de Gerna, aside from Charlotte. Of course, she's more of a mage than a noble, so to speak, like Harriet.

Anyway.

Circling and circling and circling, we end up at Duke Granz's mansion.

Now that I think about it, Riana would have been happy to bring you over to see her house, so it's not like it's that far away.

So you're walking through a winter garden.

The last person you'd expect to see in a place like this was coming through the front door of the mansion, guided by you.

"Hmm."

"......a."

"Mr. Reinhardt, I never thought I'd see you in a place like this."

A middle-aged man removes his bowler hat to say hello.

"Ah....... It's been a while."

In this situation, in this place.

Why are you here.

It gave me goosebumps.

Merchant Guild Master.

Owen de Getmora.

Episode 364.

Owen de Getmora gave me a brief bow and then headed for the main house, saying he had some business to attend to.

I watched his back as he walked away.

Being a Merchant Guild Master doesn't really matter where you are. You're going to be traveling for the money, and the Duchy of Granz is naturally going to be where the money is.

Not too long ago, that would have certainly been the case.

However, I now know that he was associated with the revolutionary forces.

Owen de Getmora is a man who can go anywhere.

So feel free to drop by the Duke of Granz for business or pleasure.

The Duke of Granz has no reason to be interested in revolution. So it's a stretch to think that Duke Granz might be involved with the revolutionary forces.

But it's not like there isn't a history of people who have everything throwing themselves into it.

I have no idea what Duke Granz is like as a person, so I have no idea what he thinks or what his temperament is like.

My head felt like it was going to crack.

What if Duke Granz was a key figure in the revolutionary forces?

So what's the point of that?

It doesn't matter what happens, since you're going to be working with the demon prince anyway, right?

No.

After the gate debacle.

Assuming the Anti-Imperial Alliance remains intact, which side am I on?

I thought it was ridiculous to think about washing dishes before the main course was served.

If you break up an anti-imperial coalition in the name of maintaining the empire, the result will be genocide.

If you maintain an anti-imperial coalition and rebel against the empire, that's war.

-click!

Behind him, he heard an outbuilding window open.

-Dude, can you get in here?

Riana calls out to me as she crackles with electricity, as if she's going to roast me if I don't get here soon.

Probably not.

You won't be Duke Granz.

It doesn't make sense.

Why should the Duke of Granz, who was born with a beautiful crown and is likely to keep it for the rest of his life, take a reckless chance with it?

But if not, what else?

Whether or not the Gate debacle is resolved, it won't change the fact that the moment I formed the Anti-Imperial Coalition, a lot of people were going to die because of my choices.

Empire or anti-empire.

I'm just now realizing another truth: my decisions are killing people.

-Don't just stand around, come on!

-Pajik!

"Okay."

Liana de Granz is a young woman who lives life without a care in the world, doing whatever she wants.

I wish I could go my whole life without knowing that.

\* \* \*

Whatever I'm thinking about, she doesn't know it.

There was a lot of talk about where we were going to go for winter break, but the response was lukewarm at best.

"I'm going to train, I've been away from home too much this time."

Ellen didn't go to tournaments either, but her desire to be strong was stronger than before, not less. She seemed to think that she shouldn't waste her time when she might have to fight a demon in the future.

I even have the continent's strongest swordswoman, Saviolin Tana, in my dormitory, though I'm not sure how long she'll be there.

Ludwig continues to bully Tana and seems to be learning from her, but Ellen hasn't been able to train with her because she's been busy preparing for Miss Temple, and now she's back home.

So I had no choice but to hang on for dear life.

"Uh huh....... I think I'm starting to get a handle on this whole Magical Research Society thing, too......."

Adelia was puzzled, but she didn't want to be away for nearly a week when the power cartridge seemed to be getting closer to completion.

Herriot has enough to do with his time, including studying dimensional magic.

"Thanks for everything, but I'm going to be busy today."

I can't explain it, but at the end of the day, I'm busy, and like Ellen, my excuse for being busy is personal training.

Eventually.

When it came to traveling, everyone but Cliff ultimately agreed that it was difficult.

"What is it? Why is everyone....... just living their lives......?"

Riana mumbles to herself, her eyes unfocused.

I looked at her and smirked.

"In case you forgot ......, isn't this how a Royal Class student with the full backing of the Empire is supposed to live?"

"Wow....... I'm really offended to hear you say that......?"

Riana mumbles to herself.

If you think about it, these kids are just a bunch of honors students.

If anything, it's weird that it doesn't!

The four of you whose superpower output goes through the roof without much effort can play, but everyone but you has to put in the work!

"......."

Riana stares helplessly at Cliff.

Are you?

And then.

Cliffman is a natural, but he needs to be trained. He hasn't yet realized his power enhancement.

But if Riana is rejected again, she may be devastated.

"That, that....... I, I am....... I am......."

Cliffman blushed, knowing that if he said yes, he was really asking me to go on a trip with him.

Riana looked at that cliffhanger and finally shook her head.

"That's it....... They're all dead....... I want you all to live hard....... Let's see how well you live......."

Riana muttered as if her soul had escaped her.

My friends are living so hard that they're losing their minds.

\* \* \*

As the evening drew nearer to the Duke of Granz's house, Riana's sanity began to return.

"Hmph."

Because it's almost time for a pu-erhage.

Is it okay to be this fond of alcohol at this age? Whether Duke Granz is a member of the revolutionary forces or not, wasn't child farming a failure in the first place?

"Oh, Miss....... I have some guests......."

"It's okay, get out of here. Get some rest, go get some rest, it's okay."

Judging by the way they quickly shooed the users away, telling them to take a break, it was clear that they knew what was going on here.

I have a lot of money and no worries about the future, so I don't have to worry about the amount.

"Hey, is this okay......?"

"So......."

Even Harriet and Adelia were fidgeting uneasily, knowing what Riana was thinking.

Almost all of the people in the Edina Archipelago cottages were users.

But there's a Duke of Granz living in the main house, and it would be rude not to say hello and let the boys have a drink.

It's not that I'm a Confucianist, it's that this is really weird, and the fact that everyone but Ellen looks at me like I shouldn't be doing this is proof of that.

One by one, Riana pushed them out the door, and the outbuilding was now empty, just as she had planned.

"Hmph, let's get started."

I cannot forgive you for your sincerity.

With that look on her face, Riana opens the display case.

-Bulkuck

"Riana, why won't you introduce me to your friends!"

"Oh, Dad?!"

A well-built man burst through the door of the outbuilding and shouted out in a booming voice.

An obviously flustered Riana finally blurted out, her eyes lighting up.

"Ack, I told you not to come to the outbuilding because I'm hanging out with my friends!"

Uh.

Something about that familiar feeling.

"Well, if you brought your friends, you should at least say hello, do you know how long I've been waiting?"

"Oh, we've seen him and her before, what else are we going to see?"

Speaking of which.

For the Miss Temple and Mr. Temple contests, Riana took Klippmann and Ellen to the Duke of Granz house.

Ellen and Cliffman tilted their heads at the Duke of Granz as if recognizing him.

"Hello."

"Go, see the Duke."

"Yeah, Ellen. Well, you're still cute. Cliffman looks like he's put on some muscle. By the way, there are some faces I don't recognize."

I and Herriot Adelia jumped to our feet and started to say something, but Riana shoved her way into Duke Granz's chest.

"This is Reinhardt, this is Adelia, this is Harriet. Okay? Get out! Get out!"

"Oh my God, this just nailed my dad. Did I say anything about yelling at you? We need to talk. See? We need to talk, kid."

"Oh, I don't know. Get out!"

What it is.

It's a far cry from Herriot and the Archduke of Saint-Thuan.

At least the Grand Duke of St. Thuan is a dignified man. The Duke of Granz seems a bit of a wimp.

"Gee, your daughter must be having a hard time with her temper, kids."

"Oh, don't be silly, get out!"

I think Duke Granz is less of a daddy's boy and more of a daughter's boy who just enjoys seeing his daughter in trouble.

That's a lot of giggling to watch Riana get annoyed.

"Get out, get out, get out, get out!"

"Uh-oh, okay, this."

In the end, Duke Granz was forced out of the villa by his daughter-in-law.

-Bang, bang, bang, bang!

"Whoa, really."

After slamming the door roughly shut, Riana locked it.

"I told him not to come, for crying out loud."

Riana sulks and shows off her sassy side.

-Bam!

The door to the outbuilding reopened with the sound of a lock opening.

"My daughter, didn't you know about this?"

A large keychain jingled in his hand.

No.

This father-daughter relationship is messy.

"If I lock the door to my house, does that mean he can't get in?"

Duke Granz chuckled as he reentered, jingling the large keychain in his hand.

"Oh, really!"

-digitize!

Riana's hair began to sparkle with lightning in her eyes.

"Gee, I thought I was just messing with you, but now you want to roast my father. I thought you said there was no point in raising a daughter. Ew."

"Nagat!"

"Yes! Go! Go!"

-click!

Duke Granz really thinks Riana might shoot lightning bolts, and this time he actually leaves the outbuilding.

-Don't drink it, kids!

It was Duke Granz, aggroing from door to door.

After the storm,

"This is why I didn't say hello!"

Riana scowled and stomped her foot.

It was honestly less than a few minutes between his appearance and his departure, and we were overwhelmed by the intensity of the Duke of Granz's impression.

"What can I say....... You're a great guy......."

Herriot mumbles something with his mouth open, and Ellen sips her tea as if she's seen that little shit a few times already.

"He's a good man."

It was the first time I'd ever heard Ellen talk about anyone in this way, and everyone was stunned. Riana's eyes lit up at the words.

"What? What's better, this or that?"

"Hmm. I guess you're an asshole by my standards."

I cross my arms and look at Riana.

That's it!

Not to the sky, but to my parents!

"Do you want to rummage?"

-Physics!

"No, it's obvious you're an asshole, this."

At my blunt conclusion, they nodded slightly, as if they could never deny it.

"That's a little....... that seems like too much......."

Adelia's reaction.

"Now that I look at it this way....... I think I was a little too hard on my dad......."

Herriot begins to reflect.

"Well, it's a little....... That's right......."

Even Kliffman.

Ellen and Cliff have seen a bit more of this shenanigans, so they must have seen a bit more of what Riana is doing.

"Do you really want to look?"

"Oh, no....... That, uh, wasn't wrong......."

Kliffman was surprisingly a man with something to say.

"Gee, really....... Does everyone really....... think that......?"

Child traits) I wouldn't listen to my parents if they were dead, but I do listen to my friends.

Even Cliff, who says the sky is yellow when Riana says it is, agrees with her, and Riana is frozen.

"I, I....... I'm the asshole....... am I?"

In the end, Riana had the typical kid who doesn't listen to her dad, but is enlightened by her friends.

\* \* \*

In a way, Duke Granz had dispelled the last of our misgivings, even if Riana didn't know it.

Obviously, he said, drink up.

When I say drink less, I mean drink more.

He meant it in the sense of letting them have their fun without him, so Duke Granz wasn't being unreasonably grumpy, even though he liked to see his daughter in trouble.

Riana and I had whiskey, and the rest of us had sweet wine.

There wasn't much to talk about. The main topic of conversation was about the juniors coming in next year.

"If only there weren't more kids like you."

Herriot said the exact same thing that Riana said today.

"How many people are like me? This is something I was born with, a talent."

"Wow....... You do realize you're good at that, right?"

"I'm surprisingly on-topic."

"Shouldn't it be a matter of wanting to fix it, not knowing about it?"

"Isn't it about time you realized that you're not the only one who's become so human that you've been eaten, you little shit?"

"You know, talking to you only makes me angry....... And stop calling me a punk!"

"You've gotten used to it, haven't you, and now you're sad when you don't hear me yell at you?"

"Awww! I don't feel bad, I don't feel bad!"

"Okay, Harriet."

"......?"

"You're a little shy now, aren't you, and it was awkward when I called you by your first name? I mean, it's easier for you to hear, right? Isn't it?"

“아아아아아아악! 그만해에에에에! 지, 진짜 나쁜 놈이야 너는! 나한테 왜 그러는데 진짜아!”

It was with great satisfaction that I succeeded in prying the lid off the Heriot for the first time in a long time.

"Oh, I'm feverish....... I feel dizzy....... It's that bastard......."

"Lie down."

"ugh......."

Harriet screamed and then lay down on the couch at an angle, feeling dizzy from the alcohol.

Herriot laid down and before I knew it, he was asleep.

Adelia stumbled drunkenly, then fell asleep with Harriet hugging her like a hugging pillow.

"Sleepy."

Ellen sipped her wine like she wasn't drunk at all, then lay down with a slash across Riana's thigh.

He'll be asleep in no time.

It was just me, Riana, and Cliff who were keeping our wits about us.

Klippmann was surprisingly unimpressed.

I wondered if he had been drinking, but it turns out he hadn't been drinking at all.

They're afraid of what they'll do if they get drunk.

"Mr. A, what did I do so wrong......."

Riana seemed to have given some serious thought to whether or not she was a harechild, and decided that she wasn't. She didn't seem to be drunk, but she was still moderately intoxicated.

I didn't drink that much. Not for the same reasons as Cliffman.

"Hey."

"I'm not an asshole."

"No, what did I say?"

As soon as I called it out, the words popped out as an automatic reflex, like I was about to slap him.

If it's right or wrong, it's usually right, and Riana is an asshole.

Of course, that's not what I'm talking about.

Owen de Getmora is a member of the revolutionary forces.

Since he's here, it's not unreasonable to suspect that Duke Granz might be a revolutionary.

But a possibility.

It's just a possibility.

To find out, we have a very important question.

"Did your father....... temple?"

"Temple, of course?"

My heart is beating like crazy.

Riana says, and takes a sip of her whiskey.

"You must have graduated from Orvis' class."

Oops.

Sickness.

365 episodes

Not everyone from Orbis Class joined the revolutionary forces. But an Orbis Class graduate, a senior.

There is no reason for Duke Granz to join the revolutionary forces.

But technically, there's no reason for anyone, young or old, rich or poor, to join the revolutionary forces.

Why else would you have to risk your life to do something.

Even for those who actually benefit from the revolution, it is in their best interest to join the revolution after it has occurred rather than risk their lives to join it.

If Duke Granz is a member of the revolutionary forces, he's obviously close to the core.

"That's what Mal says whenever he tries to convince me that he graduated magna cum laude, but honestly, I don't believe him."

Even senior graduation.

What a great material for the pursuit of fantasy. Riana sips her whiskey and points to her head, unaware of what I'm thinking.

"I'm not that smart, no matter how you slice it, and I don't know where this hair came from."

It's a little disconcerting to see him say that because his hair is bad, my dad's hair must be bad, but that's not what's important to me right now.

Am I correct in thinking that if Duke Granz is a revolutionary, then he becomes my ally because I'm going to ally with the revolutionaries anyway?

Whether Duke Granz is a revolutionary or not, in the end I'm only interested in delaying that revolution until after the Gate incident.

The Anti-Imperial Coalition is just a ruse, and there is no intention of actually forming it to rebel against the Empire.

The revolutionary forces, the independence of the Five Great Houses of God, were all wiped out by the Gate. Humanity, beyond the Empire, has suffered great damage, and it is impossible to dream of anything else.

This is the post-Gate, post-Endgame time to focus on rebuilding the world.

In the face of the great crisis of humanity, all petty interests disappear.

But what happens when that grand idea is lost?

Wouldn't it be better if the Gate debacle never happened....... Now, isn't that, like, better?

But in the end, I still haven't gotten to the heart of the gate situation.

I realized that these thoughts and worries were also empty.

\* \* \*

The three kids had gotten really rowdy, so we cleaned up early. After tucking them into their rooms one by one, Riana and Kliffman said they were going to bed, too.

I couldn't fall asleep.

A surprise party planned at the last minute to cheer me up.

Honestly, I was impressed with that, but I ended up here, and I've gotten myself into a lot of trouble.

Nothing is certain.

As you stare out the window at your garden at night, you notice someone wandering around.

A man of good character.

Duke Granz.

Not knowing what to expect, I opened the door to the outbuilding.

As the door to the outbuilding opened, he walked through the garden, watched me for a moment, and then broke into a wry smile.

"Gee, looks like I'm not the only one who can't sleep."

His smile was somehow, sad.

\* \* \*

"Did you say Reinhardt?"

"Yes, it is."

"I've heard the stories."

Being the troublemaker that he is, Duke Granz seemed to have heard a lot of stories about me.

"I mean, I've heard as much about you from my daughter as I have from you, who can throw a tantrum if I ask her to talk about Temple."

"Oh, yeah......."

Duke Granz chuckled and patted me on the shoulder.

Punching people while talking.

Riana, does this look like your dad?

Riana had apparently told Duke Granz quite a bit about me earlier in the semester, saying that there was a real weirdo at Temple. Of course, Riana doesn't seem to be the kind of girl who likes to talk to her dad much, so Duke Granz didn't really listen to my story.

Mainly.

Focus on incidents and accidents.

So.

I naturally broke out in a cold sweat.

Duke Granz.

Orbis class graduation.

Possibly a revolutionary force.

He may have a personal grudge against me for being the one who started the whole Orbis class closure debacle.

"When I heard that you fought Orbis' classmate, I thought, I don't know, but a big man is a big man."

Even if he doesn't, he's right next to the guy who was responsible for closing his alma mater.

But the smirking Duke of Granz could see nothing but admiration for his daring daughter's friend.

Either you don't care about the Orbis class, or you're just hiding your feelings.

"What happened after that might have been a little embarrassing, Reinhardt."

Rather, he was blunt about the situation.

"Yes....... I never thought that would happen......."

In fact, I had no idea that the spat would go beyond the closure of the Orbis class to the acceleration of revolutionary mobilization.

"What happens, happens."

Duke Granz looked up at the winter night sky and said.

It's like they've known about the ills of the Orbis class for a long time.

If he's saying this, he has nothing to do with the revolutionary forces.

But sleepless winter nights.

I don't know what keeps him awake, but I'm sure I'm not mistaken when I see a deep regret and a certain remorse in his expression.

As we walked along, talking, I couldn't help but glance toward the mansion and get a little giddy.

Someone was staring at me and Duke Granz.

A grown woman, arms crossed, looking at me with a narrowed brow, wondering what's so wrong with me.

When she made eye contact with me, she frowned even more and pulled the curtain shut.

I saw it, and so did Duke Granz.

"Oh, hmm....... My wife is a little sensitive."

Duchess?

Come to think of it, just as Riana didn't introduce me to the Duke, she certainly didn't introduce me to the Duchess.

Duke Granz said, sounding somehow apologetic.

What's not to like?

Or that Duke Granz doesn't go to bed until late?

But the nervous look on the Duchess's face says it all.

Disgust and contempt.

I think I felt something like that.

"Hmmmm, I'm going to go inside now. It's cold out, and it wouldn't do you any good to take a long walk at night."

"Oh, yeah. I see."

Duke Granz seemed to be holding back.

\* \* \*

The next day.

In the dining room of the outbuilding, we had a simple breakfast cooked by the users.

Sure, it was a simple meal, but this was Duke Granz, so it was also a breakfast that could handle Ellen's gigantic appetite.

The menu was simple, the portions were not.

They hadn't had too much to drink, but they didn't look hungover either.

But there was no Herriot at the breakfast table.

"And Harriet?"

"He looks like he's sleeping."

Riana shrugged at my question. She didn't seem to drink that much yesterday, is she tired?

But Herriot wasn't sleeping.

After breakfast, I was drinking tea when I opened the front door of the outbuilding and saw Harriet come in.

"Huh? Everybody's up."

"What, weren't you sleeping?"

She shook her head at my question.

"No? I'm the first one up?"

"Then where have you been without breakfast?"

Herriot scratched his cheek, a little embarrassed by my question.

"That....... asked me to have breakfast with him, so I went to....... The Duchess has......."

At that, Riana rubbed her forehead and sighed heavily.

"After....... Why not but did."

What the hell is that? Riana says, looking at Harriet with a narrowed brow in annoyance.

"Harriet, don't pay attention to whatever my mom told you because it's all bullshit."

It was a completely different atmosphere than when we were talking about Duke Granz.

He was annoyed, but he didn't seem to really dislike it.

However, when Riana talks about her mother, she does so with a genuine sense of disgust and contempt.

"Huh? Ah....... Well, he did say a lot of nice things, though......."

Herriot couldn't say yes, of course he knew, but he could only say so with a hint of embarrassment.

"No way."

Riana snapped, "That's not possible," which only made Harriet feel worse.

Herriot joined her at the table and they drank tea.

Duke Granz.

Duchess Granz.

The look you saw last night, directed at me, or at Duke Granz.

The stare of contempt.

I called Harriet for breakfast.

This means that only Heriot was called.

Daughter of the Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan.

Herriot de Saint-Ouen.

The conclusion is that the Duchess of Granz is extremely sensitive about her identity.

The conclusion is easy to draw from the look on Harriet's face, who is very troubled by Riana's words but unable to deny them.

It was clear that I had heard something I disagreed with.

\* \* \*

After breakfast, we headed back to the dorm together.

On the way back, Duke Granz saw us off.

"Hope you're doing well, it's winter, watch out for colds."

Riana looked like she was about to throw another tantrum, but she didn't say anything to Duke Granz, though she did make a face as if she remembered what she'd told us yesterday.

Child.

Added a new property for Liana de Granz.

Duke Granz looked at each of us and said hello.

"Cliffman, you'll soon realize the power of enchantment."

"Thank you, Duke."

"Adelia, I've heard you're really good. Go for it."

"What?! Ah, yes, yes, yes. Go, thank you ......."

"Ellen, it's always nice to see you eating well. One day, the food you eat will return to your body."

"Yes, sir."

Ellen took Duke Granz's crude jokes with a grain of salt.

With the exception of Riana, they all stare at Ellen, who calls Duke Granz "uncle" with a fat face, but Duke Granz's reaction is even worse.

"Heh, heh, I'll listen to him anytime!"

No.

Did you call it that on purpose.......

I can see why Ellen called Duke Granz a good man.

"Reinhardt, you're an accident waiting to happen."

"Well, you should......."

After a subtle exchange of words, whether complimentary or not, Duke Granz looked at Herriot and said.

"That....... was sorry at breakfast this morning."

"Oh, no, no, no, that's okay, that's fine."

Duke Granz looks a little sorry for himself, and Harriet is even more devastated.

What the heck was said at breakfast at the house today?

With that, we said goodbye to Duke Granz, and we started walking back to the temple.

"Hey, wait."

"Huh?"

With the group walking ahead of me, I pulled Harriet slightly behind me. so that our conversation would not be heard by the guys walking ahead.

Of course, it doesn't really matter if you hear it.

"What did the Duchess say?"

"Oh....... That?"

Herriot looked thoughtful for a moment, then shook his head.

"You don't need to know."

That's all Herriot would say.

"No, why, what?"

"You don't want to hear it."

It seemed clear to me that what I had heard was not good, and that was true in and of itself.

"No, thank you."

"It's none of your business!"

Worst of all, it's not like we're talking about a secret, and she's looking at Riana and lowering her voice to a whisper. She makes a big show of not wanting to talk, but then she looks me in the eye.

"Oh....... I'm glad you're back to your normal self, but I didn't mean for you to bother me this much......."

Herriot sighs heavily and looks up to see Riana walking ahead.

"When you get back, come to the Institute of Magic."

Not something to talk about in Riana's presence. Herriot said tersely.

Episode 366.

Herriot was reluctant to tell me about the conversation for two reasons.

One, because no matter what, you're going to end up badmouthing your friend's parents.

Secondly, I was afraid it would hurt me to hear it.

Back at the Temple, Herriot and I sat down to talk in an empty lab at the Magic Research Society mansion.

Herriot is invited to breakfast.

The Duke and Duchess of Granz were there.

Duke Granz looked puzzled, as if he hadn't expected Harriet to be at the breakfast table.

Of course, being the only one invited to breakfast would have made Harriet even more flustered.

"It's just what....... It started out with my parents asking me how I was doing, if I wanted to come to the ecliptic, and stuff like that."

The Duchess apparently had a lot of questions about Herriot, the daughter of the Archduke, not Herriot, the Temple student.

Herriot hesitated, as if he wasn't sure if he should be talking about this or not.

"And then....... Suddenly, you weren't sure if living in the temple was really a good thing....... He said something like that, and I thought......."

"What do you mean?"

"The temple educates commoners, so....... People from noble or royal families, when it's time for them to marry, what they did at the Temple becomes a scandal." ....... You don't talk about it, but behind the scenes, it's all gossiped about....... Who did what with whom, you know, this, that, and the other thing......."

a.

I get what you mean.

"So, you're saying that because Temple is a money-only school, if you're from a noble background, and you're hooking up with this guy or that guy, it's going to hurt you later in life in terms of marriage or whatever?"

"Moo, what are you talking about, that's hurtful!"

When I put it too bluntly, Harriet turned bright red and exclaimed.

But my harshness of expression caused him to slump down on the table in a rather defeated manner.

"Anyway....... I mean, you're right, just being from Temple can be a disadvantage for a guy or girl when they're looking for a mate later in life....... There are some situations where it's hard to get the proper treatment....... This."

As she says this, Herriot's forked hair falls haphazardly across the table.

That's cute.

"So the ransom is dropping?"

"Mo, ransom?! Your expression is real....... I have to agree though. That's why it's better for a young lady to have a tutor than to be educated in a place like the Temple, where she's expected to behave herself and mingle with people of lowly origins....... That way she can find a good husband later in life. By saying these things......."

"Marital quarrel?"

"That's right......."

Duke Granz exploded, and the Duchess and Duke fought over Herriot.

That's why Duke Granz apologized, because he didn't want you to see them arguing in front of his daughter's friends.

Herriot must have felt quite uncomfortable, since being called a hobo would have been a collective insult to all of his friends who had come to play.

This is not something I would say to my friend's parents, but I think the Duchess is a great lady who doesn't have the class to match her ego.

"Anyway, do you see why I didn't want to talk about it?"

"......Yes."

I didn't want to say anything because it would end up being gossip about my friend's parents, and I didn't want to hurt her feelings by crying about her humble beginnings.

"Honestly, I don't know."

Herriot sighs heavily.

"Seeking your worth from others, who you're married to, what you're like in the eyes of others, and living your life for those things." ....... Yeah, you're right, ransom. To care only about one's own ransom. If that's the behavior of a proper noble."

Herriot sees me.

"How the hell is that different from slavery?"

If you care too much about your own ransom, you end up commoditizing yourself.

A lifestyle that says you have to act and live clean and not associate with the lowly in order to find someone who will buy you more.

At the end of the day, she says, she doesn't see how that's any different from being a slave.

"I don't think my value comes solely from myself, but it doesn't come solely from anything else either, so....... a little. It's uncomfortable."

Oops.

"Awww, this is so sweet. When did she get so big?"

I'm so excited I want to bite it, but this?

Her brow twisted as I patted her head.

"Ack, what are you talking about, again, I'm a kid, don't do that!"

Harriet yelped, smoothing her disheveled hair.

"If this time last year he was telling Ludwig that he was offended when a B-class came into his A-class dorm, this is a big deal."

"!!!!"

Her face turned so bright red at my words that she looked like she was going to melt.

If facial expressions could tell you that you want to die of embarrassment, it would be this one.

"Well, don't talk about the old days....... That, and it's not about nobility or commoners....... Profit....... I don't know. Idiot. I hate you. Gee, how the hell do you even remember that......."

Eventually, Herriot's mouth stuck out like a sore thumb.

He's being deadly cute today. Is this what happens when you decide you have nothing to say?

The Duchess's attitude, while unfortunate, isn't all that strange.

In fact, there are many royalty and aristocrats who would rather not enter the Temple because they don't want to be educated alongside commoners and have no status. In reality, there are many royalty and nobility in the Temple, but there are also many people who would rather not enter the Temple because they don't want to be educated alongside the commoners and have no status.

So there are quite a few aristocrats in the same position as Duchess Granz.

In reality, Herriot is only doing this because he's ashamed of what he's said in the past, and he's always been one to categorize people by talent and status.

He would still be that way if I hadn't forced him to train his immunity.

"Honestly, when I think about it, the nobles and royals around me were strangely nice."

"Huh? Suddenly?"

"No, you're right, no matter how much Temple says you're not supposed to do it, you can actually do anything you want to lean on authority or status, and I don't recall anybody doing that to me."

At my words, Harriet stares at me with her mouth hanging open.

"Man, you're a real....... after everything you've been doing at the Temple?"

I didn't touch it because it was dirty, because if I did, I'd get hit, and you're not supposed to talk about how nice people are around you, Harriet nagged me for a while.

This is not what the guy who curses and punches you in the face when you try to take a picture is going to say.

No, not that one.

"No, I don't mean that, I mean, there are grown-ups."

"Adult?"

"Yeah. Your parents or something....... etc."

The Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan said that there was no point in having a title, since he would end up in one anyway.

Bertus called them equals under him.

Charlotte, for her own reasons, warmed up to me over time.

Duke Granz is honestly like the guy next door in terms of what he does.

Even the Emperor, although this may be due to the position that me and Ellen hold, is someone who says that you don't have to say yes when you're alone.

So there were no arrogant, self-important aristocrats like the Duchess of Granz around.

No.

It was.

Like Erhina Heinrich.

Heinrich got a few punches from me and became a good boy, and Erich saw the kids getting beaten up and he crumbled. No, Erich took a few hits from me, didn't he? I'd completely forgotten.

Um.......

Herriot wasn't wrong.

All those guys got something done to them.

When I heard that the Duchess of Granz was the epitome of arrogant aristocracy, I questioned what I had taken for granted.

"But didn't Riana care much about identities in the first place?"

"Hmm?"

Liana De Granz.

They give off an unapproachable vibe in the first place, and that's because they're cold.

In reality, he's not all furry and cuddly, and he sees and treats people as they are.

They even used to drag the Ganodab executioner around during festivals.

"I think it was....... I think."

If Riana dislikes or rejects someone, it's because she dislikes them, not because of their background.

I took it for granted that the aristocrats around me were students, parents, and people who didn't talk to me about status.

Duke Granz's cavalier treatment of commoners is rather unusual.

No matter how much Riana pretends to dislike her dad, it's clear that she's more influenced by him than her mom.

A father who treats everyone with respect, a mother who carries herself like an aristocrat, and a mother who takes authority very seriously.

Between the two of them, she takes after her dad, which is why she's so furry and blunt.

Now for the final.

There's one last step left.

"What do you say to each other when you have an argument?"

"Why do you keep asking me that?"

"They say the most fun in the world is watching a fight, and if the fancy dukes are having a fight, why shouldn't I be curious?"

"No one's wondering about that, you're so evil!"

Herriot mumbles in frustration, as if he can't win against my vicious questioning and prying.

Herriot was sitting in a seat he didn't want to be in, but he has a good memory after all.

"It's just....... The Duke said that status doesn't make you a person....... He said that if you think that way and treat people that way, you'll end up with no one left around you. The lady said....... that you are the epitome of the kind of person nobles go to the temple to be ruined....... So......."

There was a mix of indistinct sounds, but this cleared it up.

The Duke's head must have spun at the sight of his wife imposing her own ideas on him, bringing her daughter's friend to breakfast without his daughter present.

Anger makes you lose your mind.

An identity is not a person.

That says it all.

Duke Granz would have joined the revolutionary forces.

\* \* \*

Three days later.

"He is thorough."

I was in my dorm room at Temple listening to Sarkegar's report.

"How much?"

"I wonder if your guess is a stretch....... I didn't find anything that would make me think so."

At my instruction to investigate the Duke of Granz, Sarkegar sprang into action.

You may not be able to get into the most heavily guarded places, but the Duke of Granz is not one of them.

However, we did not find anything to prove that he was connected to revolutionary forces.

"If he's really involved, I suppose we'll find out in time....... Someone that thorough wouldn't leave any evidence behind. The use of coded correspondence is also something we can't figure out until we recognize the pattern and method. Nobles are so used to writing that we don't know which of the letters and papers they produce in a day are connected to the revolutionary forces. And even if we did, we wouldn't know what's in the encrypted content, since a very mundane note of regards could be a coded letter."

The last visit by Owen de Getmora was very likely a business trip, not a revolutionary one.

It was Owen de Getmora, who was clearly affiliated with the revolutionary forces, who eventually convinced the Duke of Grants that he might be a revolutionary.

If the Duke of Granz is indeed a revolutionary, it means that he is a very thorough man, contrary to the impression that he is the nice guy next door.

Sarkegaard didn't find the proof.

"However, I think your judgment is sound."

"Why?"

However, Sarkeghar agrees that Duke Granz is a member of the revolutionary forces.

"I, too, have a foot in Imperial social circles under the name of Count Argon Ponteius."

"I suppose."

"It's no secret that Arthur de Granz, the current Duke of Granz, had a love affair with a commoner woman he met at the Temple."

"Ah."

Is that what you meant by being the epitome of someone who went to the temple and ruined their life?

"So, how did it go?"

"If he did manage to escape, it couldn't have been Duke Granz."

Commoners and Love's Escape.

And fail.

"Isn't that enough of a background to make you curse who you are and where you come from?"

Sarkegar, dressed in a maid's outfit, grins wickedly, his white teeth bared.

Please.

Yeah you do realize that look is making us look about three times more evil than we actually are, right?

Anyway, that said, the Duke and Duchess of Granz are now married in an arranged marriage.

"Of course, Duchess Granz was never that status-conscious in the first place."

"I don't know, but the Duchess seems to be a bit of an asshole."

Sorry, Liana.

But your mom is an asshole.

Oh, sorry....... I'm sorry.

At my words, Sarkeghar tilts his head in a hmmm kind of way.

"If you think about it, the Duchess of Granz has a story, too. She's bound to be that kind of person......."

Having spent some time in the aristocracy, Sarkeghar had a fair amount of background knowledge about social circles and aristocratic physiology without having to do any research.

"The Duke of Granz tends to keep to himself in social circles, but the Duchess is a bit different."

"Hmm......."

"But every social gathering or party you attend, you're unknowingly being labeled as such."

Sarkegar smiles grimly.

"The Duke of Granz, who was forced to marry by his family after failing to escape his love."

"Someone who is bound to be in a failed marriage."

"A woman who was too gluttonous to be loved by her husband."

"A wretched woman who married the Duke of Granz because she coveted his power and risked a scandalous marriage."

It was eerie to hear.

"She is a noblewoman whose status was elevated because the Duke of Granz was literally a scandalous man. She's a poor, foolish woman whose very existence has become a scandal because she was originally just the second daughter of the Countess of Hanahan, who had no estates and only a title."

What she got for marrying a scandalous man was the title of Duke of Granz.

But she's despised by her social circle, and rumors follow that she's a nasty woman who abandoned her dignity to advance her status.

It was inevitable, then, that she would become someone who clung to the status of being Duchess of Granz, something she had earned after risking it all.

You despise scandal with a passion, but you end up ignoring the fact that it's what got you everything.

"I can't imagine that marriage would have been smooth sailing."

A duke who fails to escape his love and ends up being captured.

A duchess who, knowing that he was in such a situation, arranged a marriage to a great nobleman to elevate her status.

The Duchess knew it was a failure and clung to the power and prestige she thought she had gained from her marriage. If she denied that, she would have chosen a life of failure.

The duke forced the marriage.

The fact that they don't have any children other than Riana is further evidence of the failure of their marriage. At least they have Riana.

A duchess who has become obsessed with her identity.

A duke who would have looked at such a duchess and cursed her, wondering what the hell identity is.

Even from the Orbis class, long the cradle of revolutionary forces.

As Sarkozy says, there's no proof, but there's too much circumstantial evidence.

Just as Charlotte was convinced that Valier was the king's heir because of so many circumstances, even though she had no conclusive evidence.

So much so, that the Duke of Granz had now joined the revolutionary forces.

I thought about Duke Granz being a revolutionary, but in the end, I didn't have an answer.

"Okay. Anyway, whether or not Duke Granz is really involved is something I'll find out naturally when I make contact with the heads of state. What's your take on my not being there?"

"He looked disappointed, but there's a meeting of the heads of state coming up, and he's going to be there. If the Duke is a key player, he's going to be there."

"Okay. Then everything will be clear."

But in the end, a possibility is just a possibility.

I hadn't gotten to the point where I could say anything definitive yet, and even though I knew that Duke Granz was a revolutionary, I couldn't yet see how that would be a card for me.

Episode 367.

Late at night.

After his short walk, Duke Granz sat still in his office.

In the darkness, with the lights off in his office, he pondered.

He was recalling a conversation he'd had with Owen de Getmora not long before, when he'd visited him in person.

It's only when it's really urgent that he comes in person, and he agrees that it's really urgent.

Negotiating with Demonic Remnants.

"They've made it a condition that the entire senior leadership team must be present at the meeting instead of just me, and they know exactly how many people are there, so if someone doesn't show up, that alone is very likely to kill the deal.

"I wonder if this could be a trap.

"Instead, they've said they'll allow whatever they want when it comes to escorts.

"Confidence.

'Yes, I suppose so. They've slaughtered the Leviathan as well as some of their finest paladins, which means they're more than capable of stopping a counter-attack.

He was recalling a meeting with Owen de Getmora a few days earlier.

'I'm telling you, it's madness to hold the hands of demons.

'That's what I'm thinking, but the majority of the chain of command is already on board.

"We don't know what they're thinking, we don't know what they're up to, there's too much we don't know about them to join hands with them simply because they have power.

'I couldn't agree more, Your Grace,' said the Duke, 'but we can't decide everything on the spot, and the Devil isn't going to act rashly either, for it would be a handshake of a handshake to attack us.'

There was constant talk of joining forces with the remnants of the Demon Realm, the next Demon King.

However, due to the nature of the organization, it is difficult to get all the leaders together in one place, so words are communicated and opinions are gathered through written and physical communication.

The organization was in an uproar when they heard that the Demon Remnant had taken over the Merchant Guild Master.

I couldn't even figure out where it was coming from.

However, Owen said that by the time they contacted him, the demons had already identified several of the leaders, and now they had identified everyone.

"I have no choice, Your Grace.

'.......'

Holding the hands of demons is a handshake of handshakes.

Even if the revolution is complete, its authenticity will be questioned from the start. Such a revolution cannot be sustained.

But the demons already know all about them.

If they don't join hands, the demons could slaughter them all without lifting a finger if they let the Empire know about the revolutionary forces.

I'd rather be at the mercy of the demons.

Rather than trying to get rid of them without touching them, at least they took the initiative to hold hands and make things work together.

Death at the hands of an empire or the company of a dangerous enemy.

You have to choose one or the other.

But that's when the demons reached out.

Already Duke Granz sensed that the revolution had failed.

If the uprising fails, it's a failure, and if it succeeds by allying with the enemies of humanity, it's a failure because it doesn't secure the future.

No matter where you go, you're bound to fail.

'I have no choice but to....... '

According to Owen, many heads of state are welcoming the situation with open arms.

Is this really a situation where we should be celebrating empowerment?

Duke Granz was feeling terribly uneasy.

Is the revolution a failure.

Or, was it even possible to succeed in the first place?

There are internal factions and bickering, Orbis class people getting to know non-Orbis class people, political fights are commonplace, and we've come to expect it.

Never had a revolution.

Very old.

Revolutionary Organization.

It was a group that had been breathing without a revolution, rotting from within and growing in bulk.

"......."

Duke Granz left his office and walked down the hall. He had thought long and hard, but the decision had been made.

Even without your consent, the organization has already made a decision.

Being part of an organization means that there are times when you have to go along with it, even if it's against your will.

This is the only time.

-What the hell does it matter!

In the midst of his thoughts, a sharp voice pierced the Duke's ears as he walked down the hall.

I thought I was back at the temple, but it turns out she's back.

-I told you to stop hanging out with the lowlifes, and now you're bringing a few kids over to get drunk with them? If word gets out about this.......

-What are you going to do then?

At the sound of the mother-daughter bickering, the Duke sighed, as if it were a familiar occurrence.

The duke's daughter hated her home, but she had a terrible time falling asleep anywhere but at home.

-Don't you realize that this is all going to scar you? Don't you think you'll regret it if you have to experience it for yourself? Drop out of Temple now and come home! I'll take bridal classes or get a tutor, I'll take care of everything.

-Ha. If you're going to take bridal classes and live like your mom, I don't want to give you that life.

-Gee, what now?

-If I'm going to live like my mom, I'd rather live like this, mingling with the commoners. At least I don't want to end up like my mom.

The Duke stood in the hallway, listening to the conversation from afar, unable to join in or turn away.

We're a pretty tight-knit group of users, so the story doesn't get out, but we don't need to get the word out, the people who know know.

Except that the Duke of Granz sucks.

-And then you run away to marry a commoner, like your father?

-What do you think, if I run away, I'm running away to get away from my mom, not to marry a commoner?

The Duchess's frosty voice was met with an even frostier sneer from her daughter.

-what......?

-You don't even have what you want, but you have what you want and you're not even happy, so why the hell are you forcing me to live like you?

-Mu, what kind of mom....... How could you say something like that.......

The daughter, who had been raised from a young age, was not a very good listener to her mother, but the Duchess was not a weak person either; she was one of the few people the Duke knew who was not a terrible person.

As my daughter got older, the mother-daughter conflict that had always existed intensified, not weakened.

The daughter brings her friends to the manor, even though she knows her mother hates them, because she knows her dignity prevents her from saying no in front of the commoners.

-You can't talk shit to my friends anymore, you can't openly discriminate against me, and you can't look at me like that, because I'm going to make sure that you don't end up with an asshole in your house that doesn't actually exist.

-You, you! Riana! Stop!

-Bang!

As she walked out of the Duchess's visit, blushing, she locked eyes with the Duke, who was listening in the hallway.

"......."

"......."

She wasn't angry that she'd been overheard. Instead, she stared at the Duke, her eyes filled with a twisted anger.

"Daughter, your dad is......."

"On my side?"

The Duke was at a loss for words as his daughter outdid him.

I'm on your side.

It was something he'd said often.

"Just like my mom wants me to live the way she lived, my dad wants me to live the life he didn't get to live."

Identity has kept me from having what I want most.

So you can live your life trying to have those things, the Duke kept saying.

But again, it's all semantics, and it's all coercion.

Both mom and dad are just trying to force a certain life on me in the end.

Riana's words stunned the duke into silence.

"I'm sick and tired of Mom and Dad treating me like I'm the only reason their failing marriage has to stay together."

Riana brushed past the Duke, giggling.

The Duke watched with a bitter smile as his daughter left the Duke's room, seemingly intent on returning to the temple.

The only reason failed parents should stay married.

At some point, she had come to see herself as such a miserable product.

Whether it is self-inflicted.

If they know that their lives mean nothing more than that.

At some point, my daughter had been drinking on her own and falling asleep.

There have been countless times when I've seen the tear tracks in my sleeping daughter's eyes.

The duke watched as his daughter walked briskly through the garden and out of the duke's house.

It was a cloudy winter night.

\* \* \*

Two days later.

Levaina, a small nation in the southern part of the Empire.

Night time.

Duke Granz moved to meet with the next Demon King, whose arrival had the entire continent buzzing.

It's very rare for the heads of republican revolutionary organizations to come together in person.

This is because the mere fact that people from all walks of life get together for no particular reason is already somewhat suspicious.

That's why the all-hands meeting is rarely called unless there's something really important on the agenda.

This will be the first time since the last time the Orbis class was closed.

The convening place was not the ecliptic, but one of the Merchant Guild's branches in the southern part of the continent. It was disguised as a meeting of investors in the Merchant Guild's southern trading ventures.

The devil told me I could have as many escorts as I wanted, but I couldn't.

Duke Granz had a small army of trusted ducal knights and family wizards with him. It's a small group, but he thinks it's enough to get them out of the way, if not out of the way of the rest of the demons.

One of the Merchant Guild branches located in the southern part of the Empire, outside the capital city of Raziern in the Kingdom of Leviathan.

We didn't want it to be too flashy or too close to the center of town, as that would attract attention. Naturally, it was the Merchant Guild Master who found the location.

Arriving at the conference room, Duke Granz could see the large number of people who had already arrived.

Aristocrats, high-ranking officials, writers, scholars, and others from all walks of life.

The devil hasn't arrived yet.

It's not a meeting that happens very often, but under normal circumstances, we would have exchanged pleasantries, if not cheerfulness. But not now.

Right now, I'm preparing for a meeting with the demon who turned an entire continent upside down.

Whether you were in favor of it or not, there was a little bit of anxiety, anticipation, fear, and skepticism written all over everyone's face, so no one spoke up.

A roundabout doesn't go this far.

But I'm sure everyone had a teleport scroll or two in their pockets for an emergency escape.

After all the heads had gathered in time, seventeen in all.

Duke Granz was a little puzzled.

Merchant Guild Master.

Owen de Getmora was not present.

He wasn't the leader, but he was a high-ranking official in charge of the revolution's finances. Also, his direct contact with the Demon King's minions meant he had to be there as a liaison.

The discomfort soon revealed itself for what it was.

-Grrrrrrr!

We begin to hear sounds that shouldn't be heard in the human world.

"This is....... What?"

One by one, they stood up and started looking out the window.

-Flash!

-Flash!

One by one, things begin to appear in the empty space, sparkling with light.

Ogre.

Oak.

Goblins.

Many demons, including imps, were appearing at the same time.

Numerous demons, red-eyed and eared, were arriving by spatial travel, bathed in light.

"Demons!"

"They can't be serious!"

You said you were going to talk, but you were going to attack.

Demons arriving via teleportation have begun to swarm to attack the Merchant's Guild branch at the meeting place.

This is on the outskirts of the city. There's no help from the guards, and for a raid of that size, the fight would be over by the time they got there.

"Let's run!"

At someone's shout, I reached behind me and pulled out a teleportation scroll, as did everyone else.

There was always a way out in case of emergency, and that was true of Duke Granz as well.

-Complete!

However, the teleportation scroll that was supposed to glow and send them somewhere didn't respond at all.

"Move space....... Block?"

Someone muttered in a daze.

Teleport scrolling is not triggered.

However, it's not something you can set up in a short amount of time to block spatial movement.

But it's clear that there is a connection now.

"It's okay. The escorts I brought with me should be able to hold out for this long. Once we break through and get out of range of the spatial traveling crystals, we should be able to move."

The escorts he brought with him were the elite of the elite, if not the majority.

-Bang! Quack!

The knights and wizards who had already jumped at the sudden onslaught had begun to respond to the demons, their eyes glowing red.

The demons are large in number, but it's not hard to stop them.

The demons have misjudged. There is no way they could have slaughtered all the leaders of the revolutionary forces.

But Duke Granz was feeling uncomfortable.

Spatial Magic Binding.

The reddened eyes of demons.

Without even a focus.

-Grrrrrr!

-Thump! Thump!

They're just blindly swinging their weapons around.

'Brainwashing......?

I couldn't help but think that those demons had been subjected to some sort of magical action.

Needless to say, the escorts they brought with them were no match for the weapons they wielded.

The raiding demons are slaughtered before they even get a chance to take a breath.

"How the hell did they see us?"

The raid was followed by an overwhelming slaughter of the demons, and the leaders spoke in hushed tones.

Not everyone is an idiot.

It's nice to win, but.

We all know that's a bit too flimsy for a raid.

And.

Duke Granz would soon find out who the real enemy was, in the midst of the hordes of demons.

People dressed in black were wielding swords in the darkness.

"Article......?"

Someone's sword was tinted blue.

Auror Blade.

It's a testament to the Swordmaster.

A mixed group of Swordmasters, a formidable asymmetrical force, begin to overwhelm their escorts.

"The demons are that bad......?"

"No."

Duke Granz mumbles to himself as he watches his escort being shoveled away.

"It can't be the devil......."

Spatial travel has been blocked, and a number of veteran knights, along with demons, are slaughtering everyone like fallen leaves in a windstorm.

In the crowd of black-clad men, Duke Granz recognized a familiar face.

"Saviolin Tana......."

The head of Chanapelle was there.

\* \* \*

The escort was wiped out in an instant.

The marauding demons fell to the ground as their escorts were wiped out. Empty husks.

-jerky

Everyone was listening to the footsteps as they walked into the conference room.

Unable to escape, the black-clad men appeared in the room one by one.

Their workmanship was so terrible that, despite the slaughter, there was not a drop of blood on their clothes.

No one got away with it.

Everyone in this room knows Saviolin Tana's face.

A calm-faced Shanapelle looked around the room, then took a seat in one of the empty seats.

"Do you think the Empire didn't know you existed?"

She only said so calmly.

The demons didn't betray us.

The location where the spatial movement blocking account is configured.

The person who arranged the meeting location.

The person who convinced everyone to be here.

"Owen's....... and drove us here."

Owen de Getmora.

In hindsight, everyone realized that he had been lying the whole time.

So, what was the attack of the demons?

Duke Granz grits his teeth and stares at the viola tana.

"No way, you're trying to pass yourself off as a demonic......!"

The leaders are here, but the revolutionary forces themselves are everywhere.

Even if the leader dies, the will to revolution itself cannot die.

"Yes, as of this moment, your organization is under Imperial control. The Merchant Guild Master will be the head of the next revolutionary organization."

Duke Granz has no idea whose brain came up with the brilliant idea of a fishing revolutionary force.

"Internally, you were here discussing cooperation with the demonic forces, negotiations broke down, and you will all be counted as dead. Externally, of course, you will be treated as killed in an unprovoked attack."

Saviolin Tana told me that this is the kind of explanation you give to people who are about to die.

And.

She gestures toward the knights of Shanapelle, who, for once, are no longer knights, but killers.

"Kill them all. Don't traumatize them, because we'll have to tamper with their bodies and their deaths."

With that cold declaration, lives began to be lost, one by one.

Episode 368.

That time.

Sarkeghar was disguised and in contact with Owen de Getmora.

Arriving at the location of the meeting, Sarkegaard saw only one person.

Owen de Getmora.

No one else was there but him.

"What the hell is this ...... thing?"

At the words of the black-robed Sarkegar, Owen de Getmora closed his eyes tightly.

"Actually, I'd like to excuse me."

"Excuse me?"

"Yeah, that's a big one."

Owen says, looking at the mysterious black-robed figure.

"The Imperial Household would like to borrow your name once without permission."

"......What are you talking about?"

A member of the revolutionary forces mentions the imperial family. Sarkeghar sensed that something was amiss.

"Due to an incident the other day, it has come to the imperial court's attention that borrowing your name can make complicated things quite easy."

Sarkozy's words make him realize something.

Owen de Getmora is a traitor.

"So when I make this direct confession, it's to let you know that I'm doing it to solve the Empire's problems, not because I want to be on bad terms with you."

"......."

"The First Prince wants to be on good terms with you. He recognizes that you are necessary to the Empire."

1Prince.

Bertus de Gradias.

Sarkozy thought he was in contact with revolutionary forces, but he was actually in contact with Bertus's spies.

"So I'm hoping that whatever happens this time, you'll take it with a grain of salt."

They're trying to do something in Darkland's name.

"I don't know about the first prince, but you think you're safe."

"Whether it's the Revolutionaries or the Imperials I'm reaching out to, you can get what you want through me. In fact, wouldn't it be better for you to talk to the Imperials rather than the Revolutionaries?"

Owen de Getmora did not panic, lose his composure, or show fear in the face of the mysterious demon.

"Isn't that enough?"

The Merchant Guild Master's words are true.

But the fact that he was taken advantage of left a bad taste in Sarkegar's mouth.

They are the underdog, after all.

Just because you want to use it doesn't mean you can.

As such, it was inevitable that there would be times when it would be used against us by the wrong forces.

\* \* \*

Saviolin Tana stared at the body-strewn conference room with the Knights of Shanapelle in their black camouflage uniforms.

It was dirty work.

You'll be executing traitors to the Empire, but you'll need to disguise it as demonic activity.

Bertus said it was for the best, and Saviorin Tana agreed.

But the sight of them disguising the deaths as demonic made even her desensitized to carnage sickening.

Did I really have to do this?

Among the leaders of the revolutionary forces were faces she recognized.

There were a few people who wanted to be this person, and one of them was right in front of Saviolin Tana's eyes.

She opens her eyes and sees the dead body of Duke Arthur de Granz.

And.

I had a nominal, but occasional, encounter with a teacher who was an inspector.

"Follow me?

'Oh, okay.......'

'Do I eat you? Why do you always look so pouty? Oh, hello, should I say sir, or should I say Sir Tana....... Sir Tana?'

"Good as a teacher.

'Oh, yes. Good afternoon, sir.'

I saw a superimposed image of a girl, a little wild but always cheerful.

What that child's face will look like in the future. How that child will live.

I didn't see it, but I knew it without looking. Saviolin Tana gritted her teeth.

Saviolin Tana closed Duke Granz's open eyes.

I know it doesn't make anything better, but I felt like it had to be done.

"What happened to attracting the attention of the guards?"

"I believe the guards will be here in about 15 minutes."

"Okay, we're pulling out first."

Saviolin Tana has completed her mission.

She had a hunch that the empire was about to be shaken again.

\* \* \*

Imperial Emperor Emperatos, Winter Palace.

Bertus was drinking tea.

It wasn't my usual black or milk tea, but a greenish color.

Bertus was not alone.

"It's called green tea. Have you ever tried it? The leaves are the same as black tea, but the flavor is very different."

Before Bertus, similarly, sat Oscar de Gradias, a member of the imperial family, in a stiff posture.

"No....... I've heard of it, but I've never had it......."

"Right, so you don't even know what flavor it is?"

"That's right......."

Oscar felt a strange sense of dread when Bertus called out to him; as fellow royalty, they often crossed paths and spoke to each other, but it was very rare for Bertus to call out to him directly like this.

"Try it."

"Uh, ah....... Uh, yeah."

At Bertus's urging, Oscar took a sip of the green tea and barely had time to savor the shaky taste and nostalgic aroma.

Why.

Me.

That's all I can think about. Bertus glared at Oscar, who sipped his green tea.

"What do you think?"

"That....... smells good......."

"Now that you know the smell and taste of green tea, maybe you can dream of drinking it."

The unintelligible sound sends chills down Oskar's spine before he realizes he's not alone. Bertus looks at him with a coy smile.

"Do you think someone who has never had green tea can dream of drinking green tea? No, they can dream, but can they taste and smell anything like this?"

"Oh? That....... Not......."

"Yes, because people can't feel sensations in their dreams that they didn't experience."

You can't know what you don't know.

So you can't even dream of it.

Only by experiencing it can the sensation be recreated in a dream.

"A person who has never eaten meat can dream of eating meat, but the meat in that dream will be something that doesn't taste, texture, smell, or feel anything like it does in real life, and the same goes for other things, and that's what it comes down to, to make a long story short."

Bertus takes another sip of his green tea and looks out over the winter landscape.

"You can't dream about what you don't know, and even if you could, it would be very different from what it is."

"......."

"But I don't know why they're dreaming of something they don't know, haven't experienced, don't know what it is, don't know what it's like."

Oscar's fingertips were now shaking, and he tried to hide the tremor, but he couldn't.

Bertus's all-knowing gaze and words were neither violent nor aggressive, but they penetrated deep into Oscar's heart.

"I don't know what's so great about it that we're all dreaming about a world we can't see or know with our eyes open."

Oscar couldn't meet Bertus's gaze.

"Are you going to kill me....... kill me?"

Bertus smirked at Oscar's pathetic comment.

"Brother, I only kill someone when he poses that much of a threat to me, or when his death will benefit me."

"......."

"Your head is of no great value or threat to me, or to the Empire."

Worthless lives.

At that, Oscar's eyes widened and he stared at his tea.

He was a member of the revolutionary forces, but not a leader, and not a very important one at that.

So, even now that Bertus has decided to try his hand at it, it's not an important target.

"Since the ant said he had a dream, I suppose I should kill a member of the imperial family. Poor old lady, you needn't tread on his toes."

Oscar was speechless at Bertus's open contempt and sarcasm.

"So what I'm saying is, in the future, know your stuff and behave yourself."

"......."

"Answer. You should."

At Bertus's cold command, Oscar opened his mouth, his voice trembling.

"I'll keep it in mind......."

Oscar de Gradias is an ant.

Ants can't do anything about their dreams being crushed before their eyes.

After Oscar de Gradias retreated, Bertus grabbed his teacup and gulped down the cooled green tea.

In the overcast sky, it soon began to drizzle.

"I wanted to say thank you in person, preferably with my own words."

-shoot

Bertus smiled grimly and stared out the window as the winter rain began to fall.

Not long ago, Bertus called the viola Tana to the Winter Palace.

"What is it that I'm supposed to be doing?

"It's about harvesting the cancerous cells of an empire.

'Cancer cells......?

"Have you heard of the Republican Revolution?

The emperor had given his permission.

Bertus explained to Saviolin Tana the sequence of events that followed the closure of the Orbis class.

Bertus had been aware of the revolutionary forces for quite some time, just as Charlotte knew they were bound to exist.

A few of the members of the team were on the fence, as well as the core staff.

It's just that it's a bomb that's hard to tamper with, so I'm taking my time to get the full picture.

But it wasn't until the Merchant's Guild Master, Owen de Getmora, came to visit that we got it right.

Reinhardt's work with the Magical Research Society and the Rotary Club brought him into direct contact with Bertus' forces and the Merchant Guild.

It had been an indirect contact, but since then, the Merchant Guild had unwittingly developed close ties to Bertus' forces.

He sought a private audience with Bertus and confessed to the revolutionaries.

You say you have vital information on which the fate of the empire depends.

But it was not a matter to be taken lightly. The revolutionary forces outlined were mostly people with significant influence in the Empire, and the imperial hand in dealing with them could spark a massive uprising of the remaining forces.

So until we found the right way to do it, we've been struggling to get a handle on the trends via Owen de Getmora, who volunteered to be our spy.

And.

Demons appeared.

"We're going to gather the leaders together, and when we're done, we're going to disguise it as an attack by demons.

The demons provide a strong enough camouflage to conceal the truth of any event. Some might be able to deduce the truth, but the message of demonic remnants was now resonating too loudly across the continent.

The word "demonic" is enough to drown out all the noise.

After slaughtering all of their leaders, they disguise it as the work of demons.

The remnants of the Republican Revolution may see it as an Imperial conspiracy, but the masses will be so misled by the word demon that they won't see the truth.

In practice.

The demonic remnants tried to make contact with the revolutionary forces, and they did.

So the fact that the leaders were killed in a demon attack should be convincing to the remnants. There's nothing unconvincing about the idea that something was broken at the negotiating table, and that angry demons slaughtered the leaders and then disappeared.

While there will be some debate within the faction as to whether or not this is truly the work of demons, their division is not a bad thing in and of itself.

Then, Owen de Getmora will take over the remaining revolutionary forces and assume temporary leadership. And he will publish a lie about the deaths of the leaders.

The entire revolutionary force falls into the hands of the imperial government.

Saviolin Tana nodded stiffly when she heard Bertus's plan.

She is dedicated to the service of the Empire.

So we agreed that the forces working to overthrow the empire needed to be disposed of.

"But what do you mean by disguising it as the work of demons?

"We have some demon captives that we're using for research purposes, and we'll just have to release them into the field and kill them appropriately.

"......I see.

'So, it's a secret that we have Shanafel in the field. There will be a backup in charge of field operations. Shanafel will just have to concentrate on taking out the escort troops cleanly, is that possible?'

"...... is available.

The emperor's favor is already won.

The meeting place Owen has arranged also has a coven that blocks the spatial travel magic.

Shanafel kills all of the leaders of the revolutionary forces, falsifying their wounds and scattering demon corpses to disguise the fact that there was a battle with demons there.

The conditions and the location of the meeting were picked to make it easy to disguise.

They were a thorn in my side, but I couldn't seem to get them out.

Demon Remnant faction.

A well-timed excuse will defend your empire against any controversy.

It doesn't matter if the truth comes out.

It's true that the revolutionary forces dared to betray humanity and join hands with demons.

-shootaaaaa

Bertus looks out the window into the winter rain.

"Tsk."

Eventually.

The fact that he had killed a classmate's parents was disturbing.

Episode 369.

Word has spread across the Imperium that demons have attacked Raziern in the southern Kingdom of Levaina.

Technically, they were raiding a merchant guild branch outside of Raziern, but the demons were actually raiding Raziern as well.

But the damage was not great. The number of demons attacking was very small.

However, there was a very high casualty rate at a location in a remote area that was not guarded.

The Merchant's Guild branch outside of Raziern was the place to be.

The list of victims included the name of Duke Arthur de Granz.

Sarkegar has already been briefed.

You've been taken advantage of by Bertus.

I was wondering why the imperial government hadn't figured out about the revolutionary forces, but they had, they just hadn't realized it until now because they were afraid of the trouble they might cause.

In the case of the raid on the Nameless Order, the mere fact that it was a demonic raid overshadowed everything else that was suspicious, and Bertus had a different opinion.

We decide that this is the way to get rid of the revolutionaries.

In the current context, the name of a demonic nemesis is a kind of evil source that can cause any event to happen at will and blame it all on itself.

The remains of a rigged battle, strewn with the corpses of demons. A large number of human victims. Newspapers with photos of the scene and the names of the victims.

I stared at it wide-eyed.

Duke Granz.

Arthur De Grants.

He was killed in a demon attack in a small country in the southern part of the Empire.

"Why the hell is this happening......."

Harriet covered her face and wept as she remembered the day she'd just spent with the Duke of Granz.

Ellen squinted at the newspaper. As if trying to make sure she wasn't looking at the wrong thing.

"Let's go see Riana."

Ellen said, putting the newspaper down.

\* \* \*

-shoot

Winter rain was falling.

Me, Kliffman, Adelia, Harriet. Ellen.

We came to the Duke's house to visit Riana.

It would take time for the body to be recovered and returned to the duchy, and there were already a lot of people in Granz.

I'm not sure if they're relatives or not, but the Duchess's vacant expression as she's surrounded and comforted by so many people speaks volumes about the shock she's feeling right now.

Riana was no exception.

"Huh? Ah....... Wow, you're here?"

Herriot held Riana's hand still, but Riana looked like she wasn't quite sure what was happening to her.

Riana was frozen. She should be sad, but she doesn't even realize what's happened to her.

No one knows what to say to comfort them.

The people next to the Duchess were saying something, but we didn't know what to say.

I.

I didn't know what to say to Riana, who had just been through something that wasn't my doing, but had become my doing.

I didn't.

I didn't do it.

But I can't say that.

Herriot held Riana's hand still, and Ellen put her arm around Riana's shoulders.

"......."

Riana could only stare blankly into space with unfocused eyes.

\* \* \*

We stayed at the Duke of Granz.

The duchess, who is sensitive to returning home, was not sharp with those of us who stayed at the mansion during this time.

But at least she was an adult.

"Thank you, everyone. Riana, please."

She seemed to be purely grateful that we were here to take care of Riana's condition.

Unlike Riana, the Duchess cannot remain in mourning. When the body is recovered, she must organize a funeral. To do so, she must speak to the many people who have come beforehand. In the midst of all this, someone has to be in control, and that's the Duchess.

The next day.

Duke Granz's body has been recovered and returned to the duchy.

Riana stared wide-eyed at the Duke's coffin as it was brought in.

Like you know what's in there, but you can't believe it's really there or not.

The Duchess staggered over to the coffin and opened it once to take over the body.

-Ahhhhhh!

We all stared, dumbfounded, as the Duchess slumped back into her seat. Riana watched in disbelief.

"Oh, Dad....... Dad......?"

Riana staggered closer to the coffin. Herriot stared after her, unable to stop or catch her, a pitying look on his face.

Riana casts her gaze down the half-open coffin.

Riana didn't cry.

Just.

I stared at the coffin in a daze, as if something had hit me too hard.

Soon.

-Uh, ugh.......

A stifled groan escaped Riana's twisted lips.

-Ugh, ugh...... ugh. Ew! Ew! Ew! Ew! Ew! Ew! Ew! Ew! Ew!

Riana began clawing at her hair.

And.

-Flash!

Eerie thunderstorms began to streak across the pale winter sky.

-blink!

-Currrrrr!

The dozens of lightning bolts that lit up the sky and the fierce thunder that followed thankfully didn't hit the ground.

-Ahhhhhhh!

However, it was clearly not a normal weather event.

Psychics awaken their powers under extreme stress or extreme circumstances.

Just as I reinforced the self-implication a few times like that, and eventually blossomed the ghost.

Liana de Granz was no exception.

There were dozens of bolts of lightning streaking across the sky right now, and it was anybody's guess as to whether Riana would lose her cool and send a bolt of lightning crashing to the ground.

Everyone had already realized that the freak weather was coming from Riana.

The sky is going crazy.

We need to stop Riana.

-Pajik, pajijijik!

Blue sparks began to burn fiercely around Riana's body as she racked her brain, torturing herself.

This is dangerous. The people around the coffin might be swept away by Riana's rage.

Before I could say anything.

-shhh!

Ellen ran through the rain toward Riana.

-Digitize!

The current that had begun to surge around Riana was cut through by Ellen's bare, magically enhanced body, and she landed her blade squarely on the nape of Riana's neck.

Without a moment's hesitation, Ellen plunged into the fray of thunderbolts, one of which could kill her.

-Puck!

Riana's body collapsed, incapacitated in an instant, and Ellen took it lightly.

Everyone stared at Ellen in disbelief, not sure what had happened.

Ellen's quick thinking prevented what could have been a secondary catastrophe.

Ellen looks at the Duchess and says

"I'll take you inside."

"Uh, yeah....... And, thank you......."

The Duchess looked at Ellen with a complicated expression and nodded.

\* \* \*

In the mansion, in her own bedroom, Riana opened her eyes a moment later.

"......."

Riana felt a headache, like her head was whining.

Her body felt as heavy as soaked cotton. Riana stared blankly up at the ceiling.

It could be a dream.

It might be a bad dream.

When I drink too much, I often have bizarre dreams.

So, I don't know when I drank or when I passed out, but this could all be a dream.

Riana feels a vague breeze.

I dream for a long, long time, so it's an extension of that.

In fact, all you hear is an unrealistic sound, like something snapped, and suddenly your dad is dead, and the coffin is brought to the front of the mansion, and inside it.

All those times you saw something you never wanted to admit.

I woke up from a bad dream because I saw something like that.

I wanted to believe that.

"I'm tired of Mom and Dad treating me like I'm the only reason their failing marriage has to stay together.

I'm going to take that back.

I shouldn't have treated him like that if I thought it would be the last time.

So from now on, no matter who you're dealing with, no matter who you're meeting.

I need to think a little more, be a little more considerate, and say a little more, because this could be the last time I see this person.

Especially for my dad.

Because that's what I realized.

I apologize for what I said, and I promise to be the daughter who at least stays out of the way, not the daughter who makes things worse in a marriage that's already bad.

I regret all the times I ignored him and gave him a pat on the back for trying to do something.

I'm going to be different.

If only it were a dream.

Just like that.

I think.

It's not a dream.

It can't be a dream.

He clutched his right and left hands, one by one, as he stared blankly at the ceiling.

One is Adelia, the other is Harriet.

If it was all a dream.

There's no way these kids are looking at them with such concern and holding their hands.

Riana squeezed her eyes shut.

If it wasn't a dream.

I'd rather run away to my dreams.

I couldn't even do that.

A miserable tear slipped from between Riana's closed eyes.

\* \* \*

-shoot

Duke Granz's funeral was held.

There were men digging in the rain, clad in raincoats, and a priest sent by the Tuan Order stood with a scripture.

He was chanting a prayer, talking about the tranquility and rest of the dead, the purification of the soul.

After the service, mourners lined up to throw flowers into the pit.

Without an umbrella, Riana watched the spectacle with wide eyes.

Unable to cry, Riana stood in the cold winter rain. Herriot tries to put an umbrella on her, but she refuses.

Like you're punishing yourself.

As she stood in the rain, bare-chested, Riana's eyes were filled with a myriad of emotions.

The Duke of Granz was, after all, a powerful nobleman before he became a revolutionary.

Many nobles came to pay their respects, dressed in black, and spoke to the Duchess in mourning about his death.

And.

Among the mourners were first-year Royal Class students.

"......demons."

Ludwig, dressed in black, stood in front of the Duke's coffin, eyes narrowed and lips pursed in pure rage.

"Unforgivable."

I could only stare in silence as Ludwig walked away from the flowers, his eyes glowing with anger.

Regardless of their personal connections, all of the first-year students came to pay their respects.

Among them, of course, was Charlotte de Gradias.

"......."

Without looking in Riana's direction, Charlotte tossed the flowers, took a moment of silence, and walked away. Charlotte made brief eye contact with me, but said nothing.

For her escort, Saviolin Tana was also on hand.

She didn't even lay a wreath.

In this situation, there is something that only I can see.

It looks like Chanapelle has accomplished her mission.

Otherwise, there's no reason for Charlotte to have that look on her face.

There's no reason why the look in her eyes and the expression on her face when she sees Earl gone should be so strange.

There's no reason to put on a guilty face when there's no reason to feel guilty.

Naturally, Mr. Effinghauser and Mr. Mustang came to visit.

Regardless of the fact that he was a Black Order, he was doing his job as a teacher.

When Ms. Mustang saw that Riana's ice was gone, she wiped away her tears with her handkerchief and gently pulled her into a hug.

After the tribute, Mr. Effinghauser stood in front of Riana.

"If you need help, you can always find me."

"It's ......, sir."

Riana mumbled the words blankly, as if she were an answering machine, and didn't seem to think about the words themselves.

Dr. Effinghauser left me with those words and exchanged a brief glance with me.

He didn't say anything to me.

However.

Somehow, I felt like he knew this wasn't me.

And.

Bertus de Gradias also came to the tomb to pay his respects.

"......."

Bertus tossed the flowers on the grave and stared down at the coffin in silence.

Bertus stood before Riana next.

Looking at the frozen Riana, Bertus seemed to be thinking about something.

Bertus was acting for the Empire, which is what he was supposed to do.

But they framed me and killed Riana's father.

I couldn't say it wasn't me, and Bertus wouldn't say it was him.

Bertus turned to Riana with a stern look on his face, and said something to her as he too was caught in the rain.

"I'm sorry to hear that. Riana."

"......."

It was a statement.

I'm the only one in the room who can tell the difference.

Riana gritted her teeth and took a deep breath, realizing that she was in front of the prince.

"No....... Thanks for coming. Bertus."

Riana was thanking someone she should never have thanked.

I couldn't look Bertus in the face.

No matter what expression he had on his face, I couldn't help but punch him in the face.

Amidst the tributes of countless mourners, Duke Granz's coffin, nearly covered in white flowers, began to be filled with earth.

"I'm sorry, Dad."

Winter rain streamed down Riana's face.

"I'm sorry, Dad."

Despite the bitter cold and the fact that her lips were chapped, Riana stared straight ahead at Duke Granz's tomb.

"I did it all wrong."

What's so sorry. What is so regrettable.

Eventually, Riana began to cry a steady stream of clear tears that could not have been rainwater.

"I....... I was wrong......."

So I'm asking you to come back.

I'm good now.

I'm not going to be a bitch.

Now you know.

I'll do better in the future.

Why can't you come back?

Riana muttered to herself as she watched the mounds of dirt pile up over the coffin.

Of course.

Duke Granz never returned.

Episode 370.

After the funeral.

The Duchess seemed to be chatting with her relatives, and we decided to bring Riana to the outbuilding for a warm bath in case she caught a cold.

We didn't say anything. We didn't know what to say.

The story of why the devil did what he did is not something we can discuss here.

Knowing the truth, I was feeling a heavy weight.

The revolutionary forces are not lost.

It falls into Owen's clutches, and he freaks out.

The unthinkable was about to happen: the revolutionaries would be used.

The forces that want to overthrow the regime fall under its sway. This is what it's all about.

The situation sucks, but I have to agree that Bertus is way over his head.

If you messed with the revolutionaries at the wrong time, you could end up with an entire empire of revolutionaries running amok at the expense of taking out their leaders.

Bertus' plan was to disguise the attack as a demon raid and kill the leader of the revolutionary forces.

And in case the revolutionary faction falls into chaos, he's groomed Owen to be the next leader of the revolutionary faction.

Owen will make it look like we used force because something really went wrong at the negotiating table with the demons. He'll silence the internal uproar.

And in the long run, they'll weaken the revolutionary forces little by little and let them die out, or they'll create infighting and let them implode, or they'll do whatever they want.

In other words, I was completely taken advantage of.

I couldn't think of a better way to take down a revolutionary without making too much noise.

I wasn't the only one who could use the name of a demonic force. Empires holding demonic prisoners could also do things under the guise of demons.

Bertus was inspired by my killing of Leviathan.

"Be careful."

"Yes......."

Riana descended into the outbuilding's parlor, dressed lightly.

Riana sat on the couch, hugging her knees, staring blankly ahead.

We didn't say anything for a while.

No one, and I mean no one, spoke up.

Deep in the night. The silent hours have passed and everyone has gone to bed. Silence reigns in the room where the party was just a few minutes ago.

The thought of caring for Riana kept most of her friends from leaving the Duke of Granz's estate.

\* \* \*

A cold winter rainy night.

-Parse! Parse!

Cliffman was awakened by an alien sound coming from somewhere.

No, I wasn't actually asleep. I was just in a state of wandering, somewhere between sleep and consciousness.

Klippmann got out of bed and headed for the hallway.

I knew who this sound belonged to.

In the parlor, on the first floor of the unlit outbuilding.

-Pagic!

Riana sits in a daze, repeatedly casting a lightning bolt into the air.

"......what are you doing?"

At Cliffman's words, Riana snapped her head up and looked toward the stairs where Cliffman was.

"......just."

A sullen-looking Riana lowered her eyes and said.

Like the confident, energetic, and always mischievous Liana de Granz had disappeared.

Riana was there, looking depressed and frustrated.

Cliffman cautiously descended the stairs.

Then, I sat down across from Riana.

Riana looks at Cliff and smiles faintly.

"Now, you must be tired."

Kliffman was shocked by Riana's smile and words.

This is no laughing matter.

Riana laughs, even though she's not in a position to say such kind words.

Cliffman is unfamiliar with this version of Riana.

But what Cliff doesn't realize is that in this situation, people become kinder.

I had an unconditional ally on my side.

I didn't treat him like he mattered.

Thinking it would last forever, she treats him badly. Only after he's gone does she become loyal to him.

In retrospect.

Because he realized the obvious: no one can be forever to him, and he can't be forever to anyone else.

Treat people with respect.

"Thank you, everyone, for today."

Thus, Riana becomes gentle.

Regretting all the days I wasn't nice.

"......."

"Don't worry about it, he'll wake up in a bit."

Clifford stares at Riana, who seems to be a different person, even in her demeanor.

A boy named Klippmann is inarticulate to begin with.

I'm not good with people either. I thought I was getting better as I was being thrown around by this mean girl, but I'm always going backwards. I still feel awkward around people, especially girls.

No improvement.

Cliffman doesn't even know what it means to treat people casually, business as usual.

But right now, Riana is not her usual self. In this situation, Kliffman is even more unsure of what to say.

But it's weird.

Originally, it was hard for me to even look at Riana's face.

If someone stared at them, they would break out in a cold sweat and look away. Riana, in particular, had a tendency to stare, and Clifford found it unbearable; he would ask her why she kept looking away, and he would challenge her to look him in the eye.

I don't know why it's so hard, but when Riana looks at her, it's like someone is squeezing her heart, and it's painful.

But now.

Kliffman looks at Riana, but she's not looking at him.

It's not awkward to stare.

In this situation, it's hard to know what to say.

I don't know how to treat them normally, let alone comfort them.

However.

Just because you don't know, doesn't mean you can't do it.

Even if you don't know, you can at least try.

You can do something to normalize them, and you can do something to comfort them.

You just don't know if the attempt succeeded or failed.

Kliffman now.

"Riana."

"......?"

"Drink....... Do you want a drink?"

I wanted to comfort Liana de Granz.

Riana looked at Cliffman, her eyes widening slightly in surprise, as if she hadn't seen that coming.

"......."

In this situation, tassels.

For a moment, it feels like she shouldn't, but Riana stares at Cliff.

The boy's eyes, uncomfortably wide, stare back at him. He tries to look away, to do something, anything, for now.

I look into the eyes of a boy who looks like he's made the biggest leap of courage he's ever made in his life.

"Yeah, good."

Riana smiled thinly.

\* \* \*

In the middle of the night, a boy and a girl share a drink.

Strong whiskey, no snacks.

A girl who lost her father drinks alcohol.

The boy who wants to comfort the girl also drinks. It was one of those nights where you know you're going to get drunk, but you'd rather not. Because some days, you just want to anesthetize yourself and move on.

There wasn't much conversation.

With each sip of whiskey, Riana looked out the window of the outbuilding.

I could see the main house through the windows, dripping with winter rain.

Klippmann didn't ask what she was thinking. He just stood across from her and took small sips of his drink in time with Riana's tempo.

"My dad ran away to marry a commoner he met at the temple."

"...... is it?"

Klippmann listened to the story calmly. He didn't stutter or panic as usual.

Riana bit her lip slightly, as if to nibble at the edges of a noncommittal laugh, and then continued her story.

"Yeah. It failed and I got caught, but if it had worked, I wouldn't have been born."

"...... I see."

"Neither my mom nor my dad ever told me what she was like, just that she was a blot on my dad's life and a blot on my mom's life, so I don't know if she's dead or living a normal life."

Riana takes a long sip of her whiskey.

"After he was captured, the family forced him to marry, because they were in a hurry, and there were rumors. He couldn't find a good wife, so he married my mother. A paltry noble with no lands and no titles. The second daughter of the Earl of Relion."

As any socialite knows, Cliff is not a nobleman, so he has no idea what Riana is talking about when she talks about family pride.

But Kliffman was listening in silence.

"Mom would have wanted to like Dad, but Dad couldn't like Mom, and then, of course, Mom couldn't like Dad. It's doomed from the start."

"I was just a vehicle to force that creaky marriage to stay together. I don't even know how I was born, but I was born. I guess you could say I was a sacrificial lamb. Every time they had a big fight, they'd talk about me. They'd look at Riana. They'd look at me. Or me. My mom says it, my dad says it, and when it's time to make a drastic decision, it's always about me, so I'm like, "Why do you want to do this when Riana's here?"

"I was sick of it."

"Do you think we're like the only accomplishments in each other's lives?"

Riana sips her whiskey.

"Anyway, I hated my mom and I hated my dad. I hated my mom because she tried to run my life, and I hated my dad because he seemed to be letting me off the hook, but he was so blatant about wanting me to live the life he couldn't. After all, if he'd been nice to my mom from the beginning, she wouldn't have been such an evil person."

"Mom is the outright problem, but Dad is the one who pretends not to be a problem, but is actually the biggest problem."

"So I hated my mom and I hated my dad, and I really, really hated them."

Riana pours whiskey into a glass and rolls it around in the glass.

"Well, I think I liked him more than I thought I would."

I thought you didn't like it.

Because of the regret that washes over you the moment you can't see it anymore.

The rush of regret and guilt that comes with saying something you didn't realize was the last thing you'd ever say.

"I'm an asshole, just like you said."

Riana's eyes were wide and she was crying.

"Everything is....... I regret it so much......."

Clifford watched as Riana set her glass down, unable to drink, just staring into it and crying.

"Why the hell. Why the devil. My dad....... Why did he take my dad to....... Why did it have to be that way. Why did my dad have to die. He may not have been a good husband, but he was a good father to me. He may not have loved my mom, but he did love me. He may not have loved me as much as I loved him, but he loved me as much as I loved him. I used that as an excuse to rationalize our unhappy marriage. So....... 吸. 읍....... After....... And. he was a good man, my dad. He was good to people, he didn't do bad things, he was a good....... person, but......."

Cliffman stared at the sobbing Riana.

Duke Granz was a good man on the outside.

I didn't think he was a good husband, and I didn't think he was a good father, but I didn't think he was a bad father.

Riana says so in a world where her father is gone.

You can't get back what you lost.

If so, you can only hope for the best.

You can't understand why you had to lose, so you start thinking about why you had to lose.

"Me, so....... So....... I'm a psychic. I wonder if I can get revenge. I wonder if I can fight. I wonder what my power would be. I wonder if I could be that......."

Plural.

Sleepless nights.

Riana vaguely envisioned revenge, frying lightning bolts.

Because you're a superhero.

You can't pick up what you spit out, and you can't turn back time.

Maybe he can dream of revenge on the demon who took his father from him.

Riana sat alone in a daze, checking her powers. She's a psychic, and psychic powers are very rare.

The Devil is such a big name.

Even the name Duke Granz pales in comparison to the name Demon King.

So it was trampled underfoot.

On a rainy winter's night, Riana wondered if she could stand up to the mighty name of the Demon King.

He's a powerful psychic who can manipulate electricity, but there's no telling how strong he'll be.

And so, out of despair, regret, and revenge, Riana is driven.

He saw himself battling the devil, and he was afraid.

Cliffman looked at Riana as she did so.

"Let me help you."

I said, holding still.

"......?"

"Let me help you. I will."

At that, Riana's teary eyes narrowed and she stared at Cliffman.

The smaller two.

Standing in front of a giant name doesn't make much of a difference when you're working together.

"If we do it together, it'll be less difficult."

Not that it will be easier, but that it will be less difficult.

The words felt strangely real.

It's oddly realistic.

It's a statement that rings so true, so true to Kliffman's heart.

I'm not just saying that.

It was a sincere way of saying, if you're going to risk your life on the difficult task of killing a demon, I'm going to risk mine to make it a little less difficult.

"Why would you......?"

I can risk my life, but why should you?

At that question, Cliffman took a long gulp from his full bottle of whiskey and blew out a hot breath.

"We're friends."

Those were the first words out of Klippmann's mouth.

At that, Riana stared at Cliffman, unsure of how to respond.

Riana stared at Cliff, slightly frozen, before finally giving him a thin smile.

"I'm sure you have something stronger to say than that."

"......."

"But if you're this big....... You've grown a lot."

A stronger word than friend. The words made Klippmann's face widen.

"Thanks."

Just as Cliffman drained his whiskey glass in one swift motion, Riana drained the rest of her glass in one swift motion.

And then.

-jurrrrrr

He spilled all the expensive whiskey left in the bottle on the floor.

The corners of Riana's eyes cracked open, but there were no more tears.

"As for alcohol, I can't drink for a while."

Until you kill the demon.

Riana said with a wry smile.

\* \* \*

The funeral was over, and we all returned to the temple.

Riana has also returned to the Temple.

Riana was not energized.

However.

-Haah.......

-Take a break when you're tired.

-No. Add.

-No, rest, you'll only hurt yourself.

-But a little more.......

-I know this one better. Rest.

-Uh......? Ah. Yeah....... Yeah. I'll take a break, then.

Riana started doing early morning training.

Ellen and I watched from a distance as Riana and Kliffman ran together.

Stamina is not a disadvantage. And to be fair, Riana's physical strength is pretty low. Not as much as Charlotte, but not as much as a properly trained close combat student.

Riana wasn't particularly enthusiastic.

I had a superpower, a superpower that grew on its own, and that was enough.

My family was wealthy, so I didn't have to worry about life after graduation.

They're only interested in playing around with everything, and weren't they disappointed that we were living too hard not too long ago?

Gone is the Liana de Granz.

-Haah....... ha.......

-Beware of ice.

-Yes.

With a venomous glint in her eye, Riana gritted her teeth and followed Cliffman, who could barely keep up with her.

She was the one who dragged Cliffman, who was terrible at interpersonal relationships, around and tried to fix his personality somehow.

Now, Cliffman didn't seem to be stuttering or embarrassed by his treatment of Riana.

Instead, it was now Cliff who was teaching Riana something.

A common goal erased Cliff's shame, and Riana's unfaithfulness.

Their respective pain points were gone.

In the form of someone's death.

For the purpose of revenge.

Ellen and I look at Riana, sweating in the middle of winter, gritting her teeth and chasing after Cliffman.

"The devil is a long way off, I thought."

Ellen looks at me.

Champion of Tuan.

And the master of two holy objects.

That's just for us, Ellen seemed to think.

The Devil is a symbol of fear for most people, but it's not something I'll ever have to deal with or have it affect my life.

But Duke Granz has been killed by the Devil.

Someone around you has suffered grief and pain directly caused by the demon's actions, and has been changed by them.

"Reinhardt."

"Uh."

"Me, I'm angry."

Ellen's eyes were wavering.

I'm forced to admit that the Devil is really, really evil now, and this is hard for me to accept.

Ellen seemed to be furious, hating the demon for destroying her friend's life.

It's not quite the same as their anger.

"Me too."

I'm the one who's most upset.

"Let's go."

"Yes."

We run together.

Furies, even if the true object of their vengeance is different.

We build our day together.

Until the end of a day of running together and the beginning of something to look forward to.

Episode 371.

-Kwalung!

The blinding flash did more than burn the wood chips, it exploded them.

-Woof!

Then, as the inflated air was pushed out with a sharp whoosh, Dr. Effinghauser nodded in agreement.

"Thunderbolt......."

Riana watched the splintered wood with a calm expression on her face.

An outdoor training ground for experimenting with great destruction spells.

It's vacation time, but Dr. Effinghauser is consulting with Liana de Granz and checking on her abilities.

Liana de Granz's ability was to work with electricity.

But now, it's been turned into a lightning bolt from the sky kind of ability.

It wasn't nearly as instantaneous as it usually is, and it took some mental focus, but clearly Riana had dropped a lightning bolt.

"It is possible that your powers have evolved into weather-related psychic abilities. We'll have to figure that out."

Riana was still able to handle the battlefield. However, after Duke Granz's death, Riana's abilities changed.

"Don't worry about me, just maximize the abilities you already have."

"Yes."

Ms. Effinghauser stepped to the back and watched as Riana practiced her abilities.

An electric field formed around Riana's body, and it began to explode around her.

-Crunch!

Maddening currents of electricity rampaged around Riana, stretching out in all directions as if they were alive, as if they wanted to burn everything in their path.

We've added the ability to summon lightning while maximizing existing abilities.

"That's enough."

"Adjusting....... difficult."

"That will get better."

The power of the ability itself has been greatly amplified, but as a result, Riana, who is a longtime master of controlling abilities, has lost the delicacy of handling the ability itself.

Dr. Epinhauser was forced to stop his experiments when a series of thunderclaps threatened to shake the temple and the entire ecliptic.

-Pagic!

Mr. Effinghauser stood in the middle of the training grounds in a puff of white smoke, watching as Riana held up her right hand in a blank stare and fired off shots into it.

Riana slowly walked out of the training center and stood in front of Effinghauser.

"That's not enough, is it?"

You didn't ask what was missing, but we don't know what that means.

Plural.

You also don't need to ask who it's against.

Discuss sufficiency.

This is more than enough, it's too much.

For now, the devil is only seen as an absolute in people's fantasies.

"I suppose."

However, EpinHauser was not in a position to tell that truth.

"But it's already a threatening enough ability, use it with caution."

"Yes."

At Effinghauser's words, Riana holds still and generates an electric current at her fingertips.

"Sir."

"Tell me."

Riana hadn't thought much about her powers until now. She never thought she'd have to fight for a living.

"This is the first time I've ever felt like I'm lucky to have what I have."

Blitz.

A superpower that specializes in offense more than any other.

Its speed, destructive power, and killing range are unrivaled.

For the first time, Riana was grateful that she had this ability.

Effinghauser watched Riana, mesmerized, as she stared into the blue light.

Riana's abilities have grown by leaps and bounds.

But that's not enough for Riana, who wants to take on the mighty name of the Demon King.

More.

More.

It has to be stronger.

"Can I be enchanted too?"

It's not just about ability.

He seeks to make the strength of pure flesh his own.

"You'd be better off specializing in your organs. If you try to enchant them, you won't be able to do this or that."

"Reinhardt did."

There is a precedent of Reinhardt, a psychic who didn't rest on his laurels and went on to enhance his powers. Reinhardt is a special case in many ways, but that's not what Riana sees.

Be strong.

If so, you need all the power you can get.

Riana felt compelled to be blinded by strength, to not be weighed down by the name of a demon.

Late start.

They just have a different starting point: superpowers. While others strive, Riana has spent her time complacent and unconcerned about the future.

Now, if you're going to try, you should try harder than anyone else.

Effinghauser looks at Riana and says simply, "I'm sorry.

"I wouldn't say it's impossible."

Riana nodded, as if that was all the answer she needed.

\* \* \*

"What would you like to do?"

I was in my room in the dorm talking to Sarkegar.

I was used by Bertus. And by Owen de Getmora. But Bertus said, as we had talked long ago, that an empire needs enemies.

Remnants of the Demon King lurking somewhere.

It is what keeps humanity together. Where the Darklands used to be the enemy, the Empire now seeks to unite under the new concept of terrorism.

This may not be the last time we'll see the devil disguised as the devil's work.

Obviously, we don't want to touch Bertus.

However, the Merchant Guild Master.

The betrayer of the revolutionary forces and the one who will now consume them.

I had to decide what to do with him.

"I don't like it, but the Empire seems to have decided that we are a necessary evil. They don't think our power will ever be fully rebuilt, and that's arrogant."

There was anger in Sarkegar's tone.

A fallen enemy nation, not even treated as an enemy nation, but as a mask for the Empire to use at will. Sarkeghar found it infuriating.

Owen de Getmora.

He must know that his life is in danger. We can't touch the prince, but getting rid of him shouldn't be too hard for us.

The moment he decided to take advantage of us, Owen stuck his neck out.

If you kill Owen de Getmora, you can stop the Imperials from swallowing up the revolutionary forces.

However, if a chaotic revolutionary faction starts to organize after that, that's not what I want.

Sarkegaard might as well be hoping for chaos.

Removing the leaders of the revolutionary forces and bringing them under control is not Bertus' only strategy.

I had a strong feeling that my reactive response was also within the scope of Bertus' plan.

Kill or save Owen de Getmora.

By choosing between the two decisions, it's clear that Bertus is trying to determine the disposition of the Demon Remnant.

In the case of Leverier Lance, the Imperial Court would still be unconvinced that I had killed Leverier Lance with any real intent.

The imperial family is still confused as to the intentions behind the events that have turned out so well for the empire.

If I kill Owen de Getmora and disrupt the revolutionary forces' ability to organize themselves properly, the Imperial Court will pass judgment on the remnants of the demonic world. The case of Leviathan Lance was an accident, and the demonic forces are intent on overthrowing the Empire.

If you do not kill Owen de Getmora, the Empire will reserve judgment.

It would be unhelpful to leave a revolutionary faction with no chance of working with them, especially if their intentions were to rebuild the demonic world.

Keeping Owen alive could suggest that the group has ulterior motives, rather than just focusing on disrupting the Empire. However, it also raises the question of why they would want to work with the Revolutionaries in the first place.

"We can't let our enemies be convinced of who we are."

There is no reason for the Empire to know what we seek. The moment we decide to take Owen's life, the Imperials' attitude toward us is finalized.

Bertus is trying to use us. If the supposed enemy is willing to acknowledge our existence, there's no reason we can't convince them that we are the enemy.

"It's disgusting, but we'll let Owen de Getmora live. It can't hurt to have some sort of connection to the imperial family that the demonic forces can access."

"Yes, degradation."

Sarkegar nodded in understanding.

You can't take it personally and obsess over saving or killing someone's life.

The moment I thought about it, I realized that I was admitting that I had already become the kind of person who would casually put someone's life on a scale.

\* \* \*

"What was your reaction?"

"He got a little angry when I told him I was going to borrow his name, but he never touched me."

In his office, Bertus watched Owen de Getmora sipping black tea on his couch.

"I didn't think he'd make it back alive, but I'm surprised."

"That's what I thought, Your Majesty."

Owen de Getmora.

A traitor, one of the cadres of the revolutionary forces. Now it would consume the headless revolutionary forces, and slowly, it would sweep them under the rug, swing them this way and that, and then sink them.

He may have been a traitor, but in the end, he too came back from a place where his life was in danger.

Owen de Getmora was the top contributor to this operation.

Despite Bertus's instructions, he manipulated the board, manipulated the correspondence, and maneuvered his words to bring everyone together.

In practice.

The idea of joining forces with the demonic forces was met with even more opposition from the leaders of the revolutionary forces.

But by shifting letters and words, Owen misled everyone into thinking that the majority of the leadership had already decided to work with the demonic forces.

Bertus had a lot on his mind.

What the hell do they want?

When Owen told me that he had been approached and told that he wanted to join hands, I wondered if it was to overthrow the empire.

But now that their plans have been derailed, when they should have been spitting in the face of a broken plate, so to speak, they have meekly backed down.

They join forces with revolutionary forces because they want to overthrow the empire.

Then I had to kill Owen. If it's a ruined plan, at least create some chaos.

But Owen de Getmora returned safely. Did he know that if Owen was killed, there was already a plan in place to absorb the next revolutionary force?

No, that's highly unlikely, Bertus assures him. If he knew Owen was a traitor, he would have had no reason to contact him in the first place.

"I don't know what the hell they want."

Chaos or stability. If it's stability, why on earth would you want your enemy to be stable.

Bertus had solved a big problem, but he felt like he had fallen into an even bigger quagmire.

"By the way, now tell me."

"What do you mean?"

At Bertus's words, Owen smiled wryly.

"Why did he betray me?"

Owen wasn't the spy Bertus had put in from the beginning. After the Rotary Club business, he came to me out of the blue and told me everything.

Owen squints and stares into his teacup.

"Zhang Shiqi had a dream."

"It's a dream......."

"Yes, it was a long time before I realized it was a dream that wasn't going to come true, but I knew it was a dream and I was going to wake up."

"I guess you were pretty serious about the revolution."

"or not."

He seriously dreamed of revolution. Owen nonchalantly states that he seriously denied it in front of the top beneficiaries of the caste system.

The old man had risked his life against the demons alone, so he was bound to be bold in his own way, even in front of Bertus.

An old merchant dreamed of a world where everyone was equal. Seriously.

"What can I say that's already gone, but they seemed to be intoxicated with themselves discussing what the revolution was rather than dreaming of the revolution itself, and even within that, the way they were divided and treated depending on whether they were from the Orbis class or not, and how far along they were in their internal logic of the revolution....... I realized something else."

"Something else?"

"Yeah, that's just the way humans are."

Human nature, that is, discrimination and distinction.

Owen realized that even those who dreamed of equality were internally dividing people based on where they came from.

"Even in that new world, people are going to be divided, they're going to try to be divided, and some of those divided people are going to be honored and special, and some of those divided people are going to be despised and looked down upon, and if that's human nature, if that doesn't make the divisions go away, if the markers of the divisions just change, then why do we need a new world?"

"The old businessman realized too late that if you can't get rid of distinctions, there's no reason to get rid of the stable distinctions that already exist, and there's no reason to bleed to death replacing distinctions with distinctions."

Bertus stared at Owen de Getmora as he spoke.

He dreamed of revolution, but after seeing what revolutionary organizations looked like for so long, he knew it would not eliminate discrimination and segregation, but only create new ones.

He decided that such a revolution was not worth the effort, so he sought out Bertus.

Instead of replacing the pyramid, you met the person who is now at the top of the pyramid.

Bertus looked at Owen de Getmora and gave him a wicked grin.

"That's all well and good, but I wonder if it's just a vendetta or a sense of betrayal that comes from not being from the Orbis class and not being able to be a leader?"

I was loyal to the organization like a dog, but in the end, I didn't make it to the top, not because I couldn't be part of the Orbis class graduate clique.

Owen de Getmora chuckled at Bertus's malicious comment, not because he was bitter about having to settle for being an officer.

"Hehe, is that all there is to it? Partly because I'm a lowly money-grubber, and partly because I'm not a noble. Your Grace."

"Ha, ha, ha! Ha, ha. Ha, ha!"

Bertus couldn't help but chuckle at Owen de Getmora's bad joke.

Owen's inability to become the leader of a revolutionary organization speaks for itself about how contradictory it was.

Bertus laughed for a long time, then wiped a handkerchief across his eyes.

"Okay, thanks for this one, but I'll call you later if I need you."

"Call me anytime, Your Highness."

Bertus watches as Owen nods and walks away.

I had a dream, and I knew it was a bad dream.

Thus, Owen de Getmora, who pushed all those who dreamed with him into the pits of hell, was either betrayed or determined.

Owen de Getmora had a dangerous dream, but he abandoned it earlier than most, and gained immunity in exchange for selling out those he once dreamed with.

Bertus doesn't care about that.

He watched the old merchant's back, not so much stretched as stretched.

Episode 372.

Riana is a different person.

It was inevitable. Riana was actually a very powerful psychic who was growing up on her own.

He had the power, but he had no intention of using it. However, in the face of this situation, Riana was grateful to have the strength she had accumulated in her wasted years, and she was sincerely trying to hone it.

And she wasn't just working on her powers, she was working on her physical fitness, something she'd always hated, and only Cliff was helping her with that.

As a result, it's out of my control that Riana's revenge is on me.

So, who is it that Riana really needs to get back at?

Owen de Getmora, who worked within the revolutionary forces and then betrayed them at a crucial moment?

Shanafel and Saviolin Tana, who may have actually conducted the operation?

Bertus, who planned all this?

Or the emperor who reimposed the plan?

Or.

Turns out, I was the one who set this whole thing in motion?

I don't know which direction Riana should truly take the Knife of Vengeance.

I feel like it's unfair that I'm the one who got hit, but when I think about it, it's not really that unfair.

Riana seeks to be strong.

He wanted it more than any of us.

And just like that, the rest of the winter break flew by.

And, I really need to be prepared.

Prepare to be everyone's enemy.

The moment was fast approaching.

\* \* \*

[Achievement Points: 17,730].

So far, I haven't had to use it much, and I'm keeping it as an emergency fund in case something big happens. The last time I used it was during a festival, where I used it as a way to reinforce the Necromancy to create a large gap for the Reverie Rancher.

I strengthened the spirit to bind its movements and plunged the enchanted Tiamata into its heart. From then on, I became the true master of Tiamata, able to transform her into a holy sword or a demonic sword at my will.

Achievement points have always been a very powerful weapon in my arsenal because they can create a lot of variance.

Remaining Achievement Points.

There are quite a few things you can do with this.

Spending 8,000 points will allow you to bloom the fourth talent.

I have three talents: Self-Suggestion, Necromancy, and Magic Control.

[Swordsmanship - 8,000 points].

You need the Combat talent to become a Master Class, but Self-Suggestion already functions as a Combat talent. However, gaining a talent for swordsmanship now can't be a bad thing.

Earning Swordsmanship will speed up your progression to the Master Class.

After spending 8,000 points, you have 9,000 Achievement Points remaining. You'll need 16,000 points to bloom the fifth Talent, so you'll need another 7,000 achievement points to bloom the fifth Talent.

However, I'm torn between two talents.

[Swordsmanship - 8,000 points].

[Bifunctional Resistance - 8,000 points].

You may need resistance to superpowers.

As a divine spirit, you're nearly immune to mind-based magic, and you'll need antimagic, but that can be trained.

But you can't resist superpowers.

If your identity is discovered, you have many enemies.

That would include Riana de Grants. Riana's Blitz ability has become immensely powerful with her Awakening.

Of course, Riana's resistance can be countered to some extent by the shielding provided by her magical enhancements. However, if you have Bifunctional Resistance, you will be somewhat safer from Riana, as well as from other psychics in the real world.

And the real problem isn't Riana.

Scarlett.

Scarlett's immunity renders me completely helpless. I can't use self-suggestion, and I can't use words in the face of a power that nullifies the range of my powers.

Already in tournaments, people have seen Scarlett's power neutralize me. If it turns out I'm a demon, and a fight breaks out, the real danger is Scarlet, not Ellen.

If Scarlett's immunity is classified as a superpower, can she offset it with her ability resistance?

Of course, even if you don't, you can make it happen.

[Add setting].

I've never used it, but you can add a setting to Scarlett's immunity ability that says she can resist it with Dual Resistance.

However, this has the disadvantage of leaving a significant amount of achievement points on the table just to deal with Scarlett. I don't necessarily need to fight Scarlett, so it's a waste of points.

Achievement points are meant to be saved for when it matters, not rendered worthless.

Will I get to the master class faster by acquiring a talent for non-technical skills.

Or do we seek more stability by acquiring bifunctional resistance?

I didn't have to think long.

[Use 8,000 achievement points].

[Talent - 'Swordsmanship'].

Unless there's an urgent need, strive for generality.

My talents are now Swordsmanship, Mind Control, and Self-Suggestion and Necromancy.

The conditions were right for a master class.

You have 9,730 achievement points remaining.

I'd like to save this for just in case.

[Bifunctional resistance - 16,000 points].

I also wanted to make sure I had the ability to resist duplicity, just in case.

Part of me was holding back because I thought having too many talents might raise suspicions.

Is bifunctional resistance also better......?

You can't spit out talent you've eaten.

You've spent a lot of achievement points, and now you need to build them back up.

I don't know if it's the right time to do this, but at the end of the day, achievement points are a more valuable commodity to me than money.

Achievement points are the only ability that can interfere with the world, and challenges are the only way to earn them at this time.

Naturally, the list of challenges is updated periodically.

[Challenge List].

[Identify Akasha - 50,000 points].

[Find Cantus Magna - 30,000 points].

The top two challenges were also aligned with my goals. This isn't going away anytime soon.

At first, ridiculous things like slapping the emperor were at the top of the challenge, and now even the pretentious ones were rewarded with huge amounts of achievement points.

This is no time to play around.

I wanted to.

[Coming out to classmates (cross-dressing competition) - 5,000 points].

[Dating Bertus while cross-dressing - 4,000 points].

[Cross-dressing and dating Kono Lint - 4,000 points].

[Cross-dressing and going out with someone anyway - 2,000 points].

[crossdressing.......]

[Crossdressing! - 500 points].

"......."

Then yes, you son of a bitch.

You're gonna stew in this until I find it, right?

\* \* \*

I decided to forget about achievement points for the time being.

I was so blinded by the achievement points in the first place that I never thought about doing anything else with them after I went to the pageant and saw those snowballs rolling like crazy.

Because it could cause problems beyond embarrassment, and it did.

Gaining the Swordsmanship talent hasn't miraculously increased my swordsmanship. So far, I've mostly been pushing myself with specs.

Absolute skill difference.

My swordsmanship, in pure terms, is second only to Klippmann, Scarlett, and Ludwig. Don't even get me started on Ellen. She's not even close.

I was able to get the upper hand on them partly because of my self-suggestion and partly because of my enchantments.

So my approach was to push the difference in skill into overwhelming physicality.

But now, by acquiring the Swordsmanship Talent, you've been given a future where you'll be ahead of the curve in terms of pure skill.

In the end, in a situation where incremental change was a little faster than dramatic change, I stepped up my training.

One of those days.

Ellen, myself, and Cliffman were huddled in a circle on the stage.

"You think ...... is too weak?"

"Uh."

Cliffman came over with a serious look on his face and asked to speak to Ellen.

"You said you'd help me, but....... As you can see, I hate to say it, but....... Riana's psychic powers were always strong......."

"It's stronger now."

"So."

Riana's psychic powers are extremely strong after an unwanted awakening, and they're only getting stronger. It's a shame that her father's death, anger, and regret are the triggers, but she's stronger for it.

And Cliffman wants to help Riana get her revenge.

By the way.

"I didn't want to....... I don't think it would do any good to tell you that there's really going to be a fight......."

Cliffman thought he had a surplus.

How come this is.......

Why can't we get away from this kind of crap?

Cliffman is on the monster end of the spectrum when it comes to being strong on a general level.

However.

The person he's talking to is you and Ellen.

I, not to mention Ellen, have already gone beyond the orbit of the ordinary and into the orbit of the monstrous.

In other words.

If there's one monster in the Royal Class that's as natural as martial arts, it's me and Ellen. That is, if you count our growth rate rather than our actual skill.

On top of that, the guy who decided to fight alongside him was already a superpower of a very high level, but this time, his abilities suddenly exploded.

In other words, Cliffman, who is not a thousand dollars, but about a thousand, is so overwhelmed by the comparison that his plate seems infinitely smaller.

"Maybe I should be able to enchant myself......."

No this.

You're not supposed to realize that in first grade, and Ellen didn't realize it in first grade, either. It was a weird situation, and she realized it too early. She actually threw up blood and I passed out for a couple of days.

It's just that everyone else's cake is bigger, and he's gotten to the point where he thinks he's a sparrow when he's really a stork.

At this rate, it's clear that Riana is fantasizing that she might have to stay out of the way when she really needs to fight. And if there's a fight going on right now, there's a good chance it will be.

Ellen, as always, stares at Cliff in the distance.

"Don't think too quickly. It doesn't have to be that urgent."

It's one of Ellen's strong suits that she's able to comfort in a nonchalant way.

"We don't know what's going to happen at any given time; the demon might attack the temple right now, or later, when they say it's a threat to them."

Uh.......

If the demon really wants to destroy humanity and wants a demonic war, then maybe.

But not me?

I'm here with you guys!

This is what you mean when you say you feel like you're going to explode, right?

"......Yes."

The problem was that it was believable.

The incident, which was disguised as a demonic attack, led to a number of misconceptions about demonic forces.

In addition to some of the more powerful demons that have been in operation, people have come to believe that demons, including orcs and ogres, are under the control of the Devil.

Add to that the fact that they already have a sizable army.

There are also questions about why the demons attacked in the first place, but as Bertus intended, people were struck with fear of the demons, and few questioned the true reason.

More precisely, it was understood that the Merchant Guild's branch on the outskirts had been unfortunate enough to be attacked while attempting to raid the capital of the small nation of Leviathan.

Soon.

The fear of not knowing when or where the devil's hand will strike lurks in the back of everyone's mind, and Klippmann was no exception.

And.

The Temple, which houses the future of the Empire, is a top priority for the humans to raid.

Royal class there too.

It is the first place the Demon must conquer to fulfill his dreams of grandeur and destroy the future of his empire.

Cliff's anxiety that I'm still too weak, not knowing when I'll be in danger, was compelling regardless of my actual intentions.

Technically, it's too weak for Riana.

"So for now, I'm going to focus on magical sensitivity training, and I was wondering if you could help me with that."

"You already did that."

"...... just didn't work."

"But......."

Cliffman seems to have decided that if you can't get the disenchantment right, it's a non-starter.

But the enchantment was something that Ellen and I had been teaching Kliffman in our spare time.

I've somehow managed to enlighten myself, but Cliffman is still stuck in place.

It's not like you're not practicing it in the first place, so focusing on it is going to miraculously awaken your enchantment? It's not going to happen.

"I get what you're saying, but you and I are the only ones who can enhance our powers during our freshman year, and I hate to break it to you, but we're unusual. We're in our senior year, and there are seniors who haven't gotten the hang of it yet, and if we do it too soon, we could end up destroying our magic circuits and have even worse after-effects......."

"One more, now."

Cliff cut me off mid-sentence.

"What's one more?"

"Someone who can do disenchantment."

Klippmann pointed somewhere.

Apparently, that's where the B-class dorms were.

"Ludwig."

What?

The main character, this asshole.

I don't know the bird, where did he get it?

Episode 373.

There are two people in this world who are exceptions to the norm. Ellen, the talented vending machine, and me, the cheat.

but it's actually three.

I had to include the main character, Ludwig.

"......."

"......."

Ellen, myself, and Klippmann stared at Ludwig, who was sleeping peacefully in the rest room behind the on-call chaplain's office.

I know what this feels like.

He's asleep as an aftereffect of his enchantment.

"Ah, hi. You're here."

Delphine, who was nursing Ludwig's side, looked at us and tilted her head.

Ludwig's condition seemed to be fine; the yoga master teacher, who is the equivalent of a therapist in this situation, had already been there.

Or someone who doesn't have to be a master yoga teacher to do something like that.

Saviolin Tana was also sitting next to Ludwig.

"During last night's duel, Ludwig used a magical enhancement."

She said tersely.

Cliffman reached out to us today for a reason.

He knows he's being impatient, and he understands that Ellen and I are the exceptions to the rule.

But when he told me that as of yesterday, he had enchanted Ludwig with magic, I wondered if there was something really wrong with him, so I asked for a consultation.

"I was muttering something about not having enough time, or not being able to do this, or whatever, and then suddenly, I got an enchantment that made me....... I can't help but be surprised......."

Ludwig had apparently said at Duke Granz's funeral that he could not forgive the demons.

I could see that Chuck was very angry.

He's outraged that his classmate's parents were killed by a demon, and like Klippmann, he's come to believe that fighting demons is a problem that could happen at any time, not in the distant future.

So, the urgency in his heart created a very strong desire for strength, and the world responded by granting Ludwig a new path: enchantment.

Saviolin Tana seemed deeply shaken by what she had witnessed. She'd only heard about me and Ellen's magical enhancements, but in Ludwig's case, she'd seen them firsthand.

She must have been impressed, because she'd seen him work tirelessly to get to the next level.

And Cliffman.

Even Ludwig manages to enchant himself, so if he can't, it's probably because he doesn't have the right vessel.

"umm......."

"Hey, are you up?"

Ludwig whimpered and stirred, and Delphine searched his complexion.

No.

Stay in bed for a few more days!

I'd be a little self-conscious if I woke up in a day!

"Ugh....... Hmm."

Luckily, he didn't wake up one day and unwittingly stir up my self-consciousness.

Grow some more.

He's the main character, so I'll let him get away with waking up a day earlier than me.

a.

I'm thinking the same thing.

It's no wonder Cliff's ego is all he's got right now.

Ellen and I stared blankly at Ludwig, who was stirring but otherwise sound asleep and unable to wake up, and our gaze naturally shifted to Klippmann.

I feel like Ellen and I have become twins.

I'm useless.

I'm worthless.

I'm a dork.

帮助?

Me?

I need a room.

Garbage that doesn't even enchant.

I'm garbage.

Garbage needs to die.

"......."

"......."

Watching the pessimism on his face go from mild self-loathing to self-pity was almost unbearable.

"Let's go do something."

Ellen says with a calm expression.

And.

[Event Occurrence - Enchantment (Cliffman)]

[Description: Help Cliffman awaken to the power of magic].

[Reward: 2,000 Achievement Points, increased sensitivity to enchantments].

event has occurred.

Achievement Points.

I'll give you a chance to build it up since you used it so much last time.

Achievement points are always a last resort.

Plus disenchantment sensitivity.

In fact, this may be more important. Because you have to get good at enchanting and reach the master class at some point.

"Yeah, why wouldn't you?"

Ellen and I had no choice but to reverse our attitudes.

"......Yes."

If you don't do this as a reward or as a favor, I'm going to do something about it!

Of course, Delphine and Saviolin Tana had no idea what we were talking about in front of a stunned Ludwig.

Eventually.

It wasn't until we were back on the stage that we realized that all three of us were trashy in that we weren't at all concerned about Ludwig passing out.

\* \* \*

Cliffman needs a disenchantment boost.

But trying to pull strings on disenchantment when you don't have a clue is like trying to touch an elephant when you're blind, and you'll only get pooped on if you try hard enough.

So I spent a couple hours next to Kliffman, who couldn't do it, telling me to do this, that, and the other.

The result is a weird picture of Ellen and I bickering, with only Cliff having a clue.

"No, you have to do it in the sense of feeling the essence of your body."

"Integers? Can you explain what an integer is?"

"It's horsepower or essence or whatever."

"That's what you do when you can just do whatever you want. For people like me and him, you have to make it clear and organized. How else am I supposed to understand something that's already vague if you explain it in even more vague terms?"

"Can you explain it systematically?"

"No, not at all."

"......Why are you so proud?"

"You're a genius at this stuff, you should explain it to me, it's not my job."

"There's a difference between doing it and teaching it."

"No, you're good at teaching. You're good at everything, so you must be good at teaching. What's wrong with not trying? Why don't you try to teach well?"

"There's something I can't do."

"No, I told you, you'd be good at everything if you tried, so use your brain to teach well. Why don't you use your good brain, you dumbass?"

"......I'm not a paktong."

How much?

Good one.

"Huh? So who's the dick if not you?"

Ellen's complexion turned white at my words.

"No, that's not what I meant......."

"This is not you, uh."

"No, I didn't think of that, I just said I wasn't a dick."

"Really? Then who's the dick? Tell me."

"No. I don't think so."

"I thought you were someone else, not me. Tell me what you really think. Tell me what you really think!"

-Fast!

I held my breath as Ellen seemed genuinely annoyed.

"I'm the boss."

"I know."

One more scratch and I would have been hit.

Anyway, it's starting to sound like it has nothing to do with enchantment.

"Hey, guys, guys....... I think I'm going to bleed out of my ears, not my mouth......."

We gulped and stared at Cliff as he pleaded that if there was a problem with the enchantment, he'd have to take a bloodletting, which would only make his ears bleed.

Naturally.

Nothing really happened.

\* \* \*

Ellen is right when she says that doing is not the same as teaching.

Ellen or Nana.

It's clear that I'm not very good at teaching, and enchantments are particularly difficult to teach, so it was inevitable that I wouldn't make any progress.

It's kind of weird when you're enchanted because you're screaming in your ear in the first place.

So disenchantment was on the back burner and I was back to training.

I'm not sure if this is a good idea, but it does give you a sense of awareness that you're doing something.

-Billion!

"Poof!"

Only Cliff, who was struck by my sword, fell backwards into the distance.

"Ha ha....... Ha ha......."

He staggers to his feet, exhausted.

"It's not my place to say, but beating yourself up doesn't necessarily make you better."

He nodded at my words, watching only Cliff stagger to his feet.

"Still, I have to do it."

"......."

Enchantment is the last thing you want to do because you don't know what you're doing.

Assuming I was using enchantments, Cliffman was no match for me.

My swordsmanship has improved greatly due to what I've learned from Ellen, and I've already realized magic control.

Cliffman is no match for my extremely reliable enchantments. No, technically, even with no enchantments and just Self-Suggestion, Cliffman can now be dealt with.

Cliffman is no longer my opponent, unless I seal up some means, like an off-loading organ.

In a purely sword fight, I lose.

But that kind of innocence works in a fight.

If I had faced Leviathan alone, I would have fought a hundred times and died a hundred times.

But the Reverie Rancher is dead to me.

That's what fighting is all about.

You can threaten or be threatened.

It's a dichotomy where the one who ends up dead is the loser, and the one who survives is the winner. The only definition of a fight is winning.

I didn't say anything like that.

Rather, only Cliff wanted this.

Give it your all.

Otherwise, there's no point.

Cliffman agrees to help Riana in her quest to kill the demon. But he doesn't have the power to do it himself, so he wants to make sure he has the minimum requirements to do so.

Riana was a very powerful psychic before her abilities suddenly exploded. Her abilities had naturally increased to the point where they were nowhere near what they were on the desert island.

Even if she realizes the enchantment, she'll need to practice it for a while before it can help her.

Of course, there's no telling what will happen to Klippmann and Riana when the fight actually starts to unfold in front of them, and they start to dip their toes in the water.

However, just as Riana exercises to boost her weak stamina.

Kliffman, who teaches Riana to exercise, is also eager for the next step. He knew he could help Riana, but he couldn't truly help her.

Like Ellen.

Like me.

Like Ludwig.

We want to take the next step: disenchantment.

We want a guy who doesn't qualify for an exception to become one.

"I'll be there."

The picture sucked.

-Kaang! kang! kang! Kakak!

-Bam!

"Ahem!"

He misses the sword, and all he sees is Cliff getting up.

I'm doing this for my own reasons that these guys don't know about.

After all, I'm helping someone who is training to kill me.

I don't know about anyone else, but at least I shouldn't be helping him.

Ellen has the mindset that she's taking on the devil.

However, Cliffman and Riana have a clear goal: to kill the demon.

We don't know how vindictive Riana is, but we can't underestimate Cliff's desire to help her.

Like Ellen said she could die for me.

Cliff's not the only one who can think that way.

They can't reach the enchantment, so they bump into each other.

Cliffman keeps falling down and getting up, as if he's being held up by some evil force.

As if that would make it something.

I'm done with that.

Because a guy named Ludwig did it.

Just like I believe I can do it.

Like believing that if you don't get knocked down, something will get done.

I watch as Cliff gets to his feet, his legs shaking with exhaustion.

"You're not supposed to do that."

And only Ellen, watching from the sidelines, could restrain him.

As Ellen watched, Cliffman hung the water lance on its rack.

"I'm going to go visit the on-call chaplain."

"......."

If exhaustion is the problem, then you're not exhausted.

According to Adriana, this type of training is not very good. It's technically running on medication.

But because we are told to take our time and grow stronger, we all believe that the demonic threat can invade our daily lives at any time.

After being healed by a priest, Klippmann was in good shape.

Enchantments are a mystery.

All you can do is watch sword clash with sword.

It's not that he believes he'll get somewhere at the end of it, it's just that it's all he can do.

It's not weak, and it's not a dull talent.

However, the comparisons are so overwhelming that Kliffman finds himself paled in comparison.

"You shouldn't do that."

"It's okay."

Kliffman stares at me with a calm expression.

Ellen had been watching me and Kliffman duke it out.

\* \* \*

-Kang! ka-kang! Kaduk!

-Billion!

"Boom!"

Ellen stared at Cliffman as he rolled on the floor.

I can't even count how many hours it's been, or how many times.

No match.

Reinhardt can enhance his combat abilities in two ways.

Once by self-suggestion and twice by enchantment.

Ellen doesn't go that far, but if she has Tiamata, she can be enhanced by three levels.

Ellen also sensed that Reinhardt's magical enhancement was much more stable than it had been before.

Even though I kept using Enchantment, my skill level was not much different than when I first started playing. It was as if the skill level of the enchantment itself had suddenly jumped. Over the course of several hours, Klippmann received several healings from the priest, but Reinhardt did not seek him out.

Reinhardt was used to doing weird things like suddenly becoming stronger, like vaulting, so this didn't seem strange to Ellen.

But.

Cliffman is no Reinhardt.

A bizarre superpower called self-suggestion is the source of Reinhardt's strange strength.

Klippmann has no such thing.

So, you can think you want to be as strong as Reinhardt, but you can't be.

If using evil made everyone stronger, the world would be littered with swordmasters, archmages, and psychics.

Ellen feels a sense of déjà vu as she watches Cliff lunge at her again and again.

Reinhardt stands like an iron wall, taking down Klippmann time and time again.

After being knocked down and knocked out, Klippmann gets back up and stands before Reinhardt.

You can see the superimposition of Klippmann's reflection on Reinhardt's and Reinhardt's reflection on Klippmann's.

Reinhardt, whose role had always been to get knocked down, suddenly found himself standing like an iron wall in front of someone.

Ellen can't deny it now.

-Ka-ching!

"Poof!"

Reinhardt is strong.

Indeed, in the past, Klippmann had always been in a position to bring Reinhardt to his knees. Somewhere along the line, the balance of power had shifted, and it seemed to be irreversible.

More than Ludwig feels a strange inferiority complex to Reinhard.

The core of Kliffman's inferiority complex is Reinhardt, not Ludwig, who suddenly realized his enchantment yesterday.

Ludwig has been watching Reinhardt's growth from afar, at least in the B class.

But Kliffman had been watching.

It's like going toe to toe, sword to sword, always winning, and then at some point you just can't win anymore.

Reinhardt has gone from being a one-fold opponent to a two-fold opponent to a three-fold opponent.

Cliffman was never lazy. He's always worked hard.

They both worked hard, but only Reinhardt got stronger quickly. Sure, Klippmann would have gotten stronger, but Reinhardt was too fast.

Klippmann had to watch from the sidelines as a runner who had started far behind him was nowhere to be seen.

The good thing about Cliff is that he doesn't translate that inferiority complex into malice and hate.

In no way, shape, or form can inferiority complexes not exist.

-Ka-ching!

"Boom!"

From the position of being knocked down to being knocked out, Kliffman is knocked down, knocked over, knocked down, and knocked out again and again by the opponent he once toyed with.

"Ha ha....... Ha ha......."

Reinhardt knew what Klippmann was feeling, and he could never be at ease.

At least that's how it seemed to Ellen. Still, Reinhardt was in no mood to pity Cliff.

Pity is the last thing Cliff needs right now.

When the person in front of you gives you a pity party, it's a sign that you'll never get ahead.

At least Reinhardt didn't pity Cliffman.

I've been told to give it my all, but I'm only dealing with Cliff.

But eventually.

At this point, Klippmann was no match for Reinhardt.

Just as Ellen was an insurmountable wall to Reinhard, Reinhard was now an insurmountable wall to someone else.

To Ludwig, who has just discovered enchantment, and to Klippmann, who can't even do that yet.

I became that wall, looking down at my fallen opponent, not the least bit tired.

Episode 374.

Reinhardt became strong in his own way.

I got stronger by bumping into things and taking risks.

That's Reinhardt's way.

That's not going to work for Klippmann either.

But.

I wonder if it really doesn't work.

Ellen ponders.

Cliff's talent.

Think about "battles.

It's a talent for combat in a very broad sense.

Talent for winning battles.

This includes any weapon used.

However, Klippmann continues to fall to Reinhardt.

Cliff's talent is.

Which it is.

-Pakang!

Reinhardt's dueling sword was shattered by Klippmann's dueling sword.

Instead, Reinhardt, the one whose dueling sword had been broken, pulled back hard, dodging Klippmann's dueling sword while simultaneously catching him in the throat.

-Thump!

"Boom!"

Even with his sword shattered, Reinhardt's reaction time gives him the edge.

Seeing only Cliff stagger to his feet, Ellen turns to the two of them and says, "I'm sorry.

"Stop."

"Okay, now get some rest, it's not just today......."

"No, more like......."

Ellen glared at Cliffman when he said he could do more.

"You can't do this."

Ellen swept the shattered pieces of the water lance away with her broom, then snatched the water lance from Cliffman's hand and hung it on the rack.

"We need to do it differently."

"Differently......?"

Ellen looks at Reinhardt.

"Reinhardt."

"......?"

Reinhardt doesn't know what Ellen is thinking.

"You, can you bring her over?"

"What? Are you Olivia?"

"Yes."

"No, he's suddenly like, "Why?"

"I wish she would help me."

Olivia's help.

Reinhardt seemed to think for a moment, then nodded.

"Okay. I'll talk to him."

Cliffman was dumbfounded, and Ellen waited for Olivia to arrive, leaning against the training room window with her arms crossed.

How long have I been waiting.

-Bulkuck

"Why are you looking for me at ......?"

Olivia Ranze had been summoned by Reinhardt, and she had come reluctantly, but she had made it clear that she didn't like it. But Ellen didn't seem to have any animosity.

Ellen knows.

Ever since I shared my last secret, Olivia's hostility feels like a mask.

It's not that much of an enemy.

Knowing that neither could pose more than a moderate threat or be malicious, they were forced to accept each other on some level, even though they didn't like each other.

"My sister needs help."

"What, my help?"

Olivia's brow narrowed, as if that made her feel even worse.

"Why should I help you?"

"He's the one helping, not me."

Ellen was referring to Kliffman.

Suddenly, Kliffman's face went blank as fifth-grader Olivia Ranze, whom he'd barely met but had heard of by reputation, looked up at him.

I've become immune in many ways, but it's still hard to deal with people who don't know Cliff at all.

Ellen walks to the center of the training grounds and looks at Cliff without her training sword.

-curl!

Ellen, now enchanted, stares at Cliffman in disbelief.

"With your skills, if you think I'm going to kill him, you can stop me before I do, right?"

"Uh....... What?"

Olivia blanched, because it was a blunt admission that you were much better at this than I was.

"Can you or can't you?"

"I guess I should be able to do that....... No, I mean, what if they come up and ask me to do that, why would I do that?"

"Ah."

Then Reinhardt let out a gasp as if he'd realized something.

Cliffman was still frozen, not sure what was going on.

Ellen Artorius looks at Cliffman in the blue flames of her enchantment.

"You could really die from now on."

"Uh....... Huh?"

"I'm not kidding."

Combat.

It's not about dueling.

We're talking about a real fight.

Ellen knew that Kliffman's talents would be realized in the real world.

"Do you still want to do it?"

Kliffman realized what Ellen was hinting at.

It's not about overpowering your opponent and finishing them off. Only when your life is truly on the line, only when there is a sense of urgency, will your talent truly shine.

In a fight where your life is really on the line, your talents really come into play.

That's why I brought Olivia in.

He can intervene in a crisis and restrain Ellen, and only Cliff is powerful enough to heal her if she's injured.

Kliffman stares into Ellen's calm eyes.

Whatever Reinhardt whispered, Olivia sighed and nodded that she understood.

Cliffman swallows hard and looks at Ellen.

He's not a prankster.

You said you're going to fight like you're going to kill yourself, and you're going to fight like you're going to kill yourself because there are safeguards.

"I'll do it."

Kliffman gets into position.

No further conversation is necessary.

Ellen pushes forward.

-Thump!

Kliffman didn't even see Ellen approaching.

-Bam!

"Big......!"

-Bang!

A dull blow to the stomach sent Klippmann sprawling across the training center floor for several laps.

"Off......wink....... Cuck! Cuck!"

He hadn't even gotten up yet, and red blood was dripping from Klippmann's mouth.

"Holy....... That bitch!"

Olivia turned white and quickly walked over to Klippmann and cast a holy spell on him.

"Heh....... Heh. 허억....... 헉......."

If not for Olivia's timely intervention, Cliffman could have actually died from a ruptured intestine. Cliffman recovered from the pain, but his complexion was white and he was shaking violently.

Cliffman couldn't even speak, and it was Olivia who was upset.

"Dude, you're crazy, you're going to die!"

But Ellen's expression was calm.

"If you can't do it, let's stop. I'm not going to force you to do it."

Ellen said to Klippmann with a frosty look.

"Instead, if you say go ahead, I'm not going to mess with you."

If it's a talent you have to put your life on the line for, it's only halfway there if you put your life on the line.

Cliffman wants to be strong.

The result is the same as Reinhardt's.

Fighting for his life. Reinhardt is stronger for it.

If you want to follow along, you'll have to fight a battle that would get Cliffman killed.

A fight, not a duel.

Already, Ellen has shown that she's not willing to cut her any slack.

That was the last of the "maybe's" in Klippmann's mind.

Klippmann gets slowly to his feet.

"Go, thank you....... I, uh, will, though."

"Hey....... What are you guys doing? Why are you doing this?"

Whether Olivia is frozen or not, Cliffman is desperate in his own way.

You've decided to take on the demon. You have decided to help Riana get her revenge.

You can't back down when you're about to awaken a talent you didn't know you had.

"Let's do it, Ellen."

"Yeah."

"No....... Reinhardt, what's wrong with them?"

Olivia nudged Reinhardt, who mumbled something soothing to her as if to say, "Wait and see.

If it had been a water sword, he would have been stabbed through the stomach.

Ellen's fist is a minimal control device.

Cliff's talent is his own, no matter what weapon he's wielding.

Ellen is objectively stronger than Reinhardt.

Against Reinhardt, Klippmann lost in a matter of moves, and Klippmann didn't even see Ellen's rush just now.

Olivia can heal you, but if she doesn't react quickly enough, or if you hit the wrong spot, you could die.

It's that tension that Ellen is trying to give you.

If you do it wrong, you really die.

So if there's a power within you that you don't realize you have, bring it out.

It's Cliff himself who's been clinging to Reinhardt all day because he wants to be strong.

I can't tell Ellen that I want to quit because I'm afraid of fighting too much.

Cliffman grits his teeth and looks at Ellen.

"Here we go."

With another warning, Ellen moves on.

-Thump!

I still couldn't follow the figure.

You can't avoid the unseen.

Unless you intentionally miss, that's impossible.

-Bam!

Ellen's fist was blocked by the white shield that formed across Kliffman's chest.

This time, Cliffman was unable to react. It was Olivia's hastily cast divine magic that blocked Ellen's fist.

"Are you sure you want to kill ......?"

Olivia's volley was narrowly blocked.

"Isn't ...... the flow we should be avoiding?"

Klippmann didn't escape.

"No.

But just before the shield formed, Ellen saw Cliffman stir slightly.

Without the shield, it would have allowed the attack anyway.

"I was trying to avoid the invisible.

However, Klippmann was clearly attempting to avoid exactly that which the senses cannot know.

I don't know if it's instinct or what.

Klippmann's talent could not reach victory, but he did make moves to get there.

Olivia looked at Ellen and Cliff, then sighed as if she had no choice.

"You're in the wrong weight class. Get out."

"......."

Olivia didn't know the details, but she knew what the first graders were trying to do.

Ellen is too fast and too strong. If she goes for the kill, she might actually kill Cliff before Olivia can react.

"Reinhard, you do it."

"Being treated like a proper....... Sounds like a dog to me."

Reinhardt scratches the back of his head, grabs Ellen by the shoulders, and pulls her back.

Someone Olivia can handle in an emergency, and someone who could be a very real threat to Cliffman if she really goes for it.

Ellen is out of her weight class.

"Well, you're not wrong."

So, in the end, it was Reinhardt.

Give it your all, Klippmann continued.

But that's not to say you should do it with a killer attitude.

Reinhardt will be killing from now on. Even more so than Ellen. He'll have faith that Olivia will do something about it.

But don't count on Cliffman.

It's only when you do it like you're going to die if you get it wrong that you realize your true talent.

-curl!

Reinhardt's body is once again enveloped in blue energy.

Strengthens one's physical body by self-suggestion.

Fighting with the intention of killing your opponent, as opposed to going all out.

Cliff doesn't know it, but Reinhardt does, and there's something that only those who have been there and done that can have.

"Come on, let's do it."

Live.

Klippmann was feeling alive in Reinhardt now.

His vague belief that Olivia would protect him was gone in that one life.

With the feeling that someone is choking you.

Reinhardt rushed in on Klippmann.

Not as fast as Ellen.

But it's a hard speed to feel.

Shoulder movement.

You can only see the stride.

Klippmann instinctively knows where Reinhardt is going with that trajectory.

The left foot is the axis.

Retraction of the right shoulder.

Soon, I realized that my right arm was going to move.

The body realizes, not the head, that the trajectory is aimed at the face.

If an enchanted fist lands on her face, and Olivia is unable to react to it.

You really do die.

Unresponsive.

Correct.

-shhhh!

But.

"......."

At that moment, Klippmann dodged the punch with a shake of his head and dived into Reinhardt's arms.

In a bizarre sensation where the body itself reacts, not the head.

-Bam!

"......."

Klippmann lunges in with an uppercut that lands flush against Reinhardt's jaw.

Cliffman's strength and size are not normal.

And the jaw is sharp.

Under normal circumstances, the fight should end here.

"Oh."

However, Reinhardt, who had been hit in the jaw, was chuckling.

Like you don't feel the slightest blow.

"Surely, that's different?"

The difference between power and intensity.

-Bam!

"Curb!"

As if that wasn't bad enough, Reinhardt followed up with a knee to Klippmann's abdomen.

It responded and even fed counters, but it couldn't break through the enchantment's defenses.

Reinhardt clenches his jaw as he watches Cliff bounce and roll across the floor.

"Hmph....... ugh......."

"Do some more."

Reinhardt chuckles as he watches Klippmann gasp for air.

"I'm sure it'll turn into something."

I'm really only saying this for Cliff's sake.

He looked, acted, and spoke like a third-rate villain.

\* \* \*

Olivia was right that Reinhardt, not Ellen, would be a better opponent.

Ellen was too fast and too strong, a barrier too high even for Cliff's talents.

It's true that Reinhardt is relatively weak compared to Ellen, but Reinhardt was able to bring out the best in Klippmann's talent by being more technical.

-Per billion! Puff! Thump!

You can't take a punch from Reinhardt, who has unleashed his full range of abilities, and there's a very large overall weight difference.

However, Cliffman can't take it, so he dodges and sidesteps Reinhardt's attacks to get through the gap.

He takes what he shouldn't, gets pushed around, and eventually gives up a fatal shot that Olivia recovers from, but clearly Cliff is not the same man he once was.

Both Olivia and Ellen were watching them fight.

"......I don't know, she moves better than you do."

"I think so, too."

To some extent, both realized that Klippmann was more mobile against Reinhardt than he was against Ellen.

The gift of combat.

It's a talent that really comes into its own in times of crisis and real-life situations.

Kliffman's talents were clearly being utilized in a time of crisis.

Ellen could see why Klippmann's talent was more pronounced in the fight against Reinhardt.

Ellen has a hard time reading emotions in facial expressions.

But right now, Reinhardt exudes hostility as it is, even seems alive.

The reason for this is simple.

Ellen doesn't have much of an expression, and her face is subtly venomous.

So in person, it's hard to see a sense of danger in Ellen's calm demeanor. It's just that she's unpredictably deadly.

However, Reinhardt's impression is dirty.

They give off the vibe that if you met them in a fight, you'd want to tear them apart.

So, regardless of actual skill, Reinhardt has a lot of momentum, like, "You've got to hang something," and Ellen doesn't have that.

In reality, it's Reinhardt, not Ellen, who creates more tension.

There's just enough time for Ellen to realize that she's outmatched, Reinhardt's momentum is killer, and Cliff is increasingly cornered by the back-and-forth.

-Bam!

"Turn off...... Yuck!"

Goro.

In many ways, Reinhardt was the perfect opponent to draw out Klippmann's strength. Reinhard looks down at the fallen Klippmann as Olivia restores him to health.

"If you're this talented, aren't you still a long way off?"

Add a splash there.

Reinhardt's taunt causes Klippmann to rise to his feet. Reinhardt smirks at him.

"Am I being too generous yet?"

"......."

Ellen knows what's wrong with Reinhardt.

In addition to the sense of urgency, he's trying to draw out Klippmann's desire to win by provoking him.

"If you'll excuse me, I'm having a hard time with this."

I know.

I know what Reinhardt is doing.

It's not for nothing.

"Try a little harder."

I know.

Too bad.

"Reinhardt....... Okay, okay, but this is really bad."

Olivia mumbles to herself, wondering if she's feeling it in real time.

-Thump!

Klippmann lunged and swung his fist at Ming Qi, but Reinhardt dodged and tripped Klippmann, sending him tumbling to the ground.

Reinhardt raises his foot toward Klippmann's head as he falls to the ground.

Reinhardt, smiling coldly, tries to crush Klippmann's face.

If you're at full strength, your head will crack.

-Thump!

Reinhardt immediately throws a leg kick, and Klippmann barely manages to roll over and bounce back to his feet.

It's true that it's a provocation, but Reinhardt's hand was merciless.

Reinhardt smiles wryly at Cliffman, who has managed to get back to his feet.

I'd like to think the murderousness and madness boiling in that smile was an act, but no matter how I looked at it, it wasn't.

"Why."

Reinhardt looks at Klippmann and smiles.

"The devil is in the details."

"Think of it this way."

Cliff doesn't know what he meant by that, but it sent chills down his spine.

"Are you still going to do this?"

We don't know what the real devil is.

But would you do this even if the devil was in your face?

He rolls on the ground, dodges somehow, and his attacks don't work.

If it was a demon in front of you, you might not even be able to have this conversation. You'd be dead before you had a chance to dodge the first sum.

Will I die without being able to squirm.

It's not the Devil in front of you. The Devil must be a very frightening, evil, and powerful being, unlike Reinhardt.

"Let's do some image training."

However.

Reinhardt grinned a smile that looked wicked to say the least.

"I am the devil."

I whisper to Klippmann.

I am the devil.

He doesn't understand the power behind the words. But he senses something in Reinhardt's words that is frightening, almost hallucinatory.

The thing in front of me was not Reinhardt, but some inscrutable, powerful entity.

-snap

A cold sweat broke out all over Kliffman's body.

As if under some kind of evil spell.

As if Reinhardt had hypnotized me.

Reinhardt feels like something else entirely. Klippmann surrenders himself to any suggestion or hypnosis.

What you see before you is the devil.

You can't beat that.

You can't beat that.

We decided to fight together.

If you're going to fight, you should be able to stand by your side. You can't be pushed aside for being distracting and intrusive in a real fight.

You are weak.

If you're an underdog, you have to bet big against the big boys.

What to do if what's in front of you is truly the devil.

One arm, one leg, one life.

Or, if you can't even do that, a finger.

If that's not possible, you're going to have to pay with your life.

If you, as a weakling, can do that much against a demon, it will be an incredible feat. He's going to be strong, and you're going to be doing something heroic if you can do that.

-shhhh!

Reinhardt lunges in with swinging rights and lefts and tries to counter with a left hand but Reinhardt shakes him off and circles away.

That's about as good as it gets.

His own fists can't penetrate Reinhardt's magical enhancements, so when he can somehow deflect an inscrutable move and counter it, he's already grown.

This should be enough.

This is the best of the underdog.

All you can do is dodge Reinhardt's onslaught.

Against demons, you're risking your life to get a single lifesteal.

I doubt that's even possible.

Indeed.

Is that enough.

"......."

And that's it.

Klippmann grits his teeth and stares at Reinhardt, who smiles coldly and looks for an opening.

Is it okay to be an underdog?

This can't be good.

His talent is combat.

The purpose of the talent is not combat.

Winning the battle.

Winning the fight.

The true name of this talent is not in the fight itself.

The true name of this talent is Victory.

To fight, to win.

It's about getting through it.

You'll never be satisfied with just plucking.

Avoidance is never good enough.

The purpose of the battle is to win.

There's no such thing as fighting to lose.

Then the talent called combat is only worthy of its name if it results in victory.

"Here we go."

Reinhard approaches. In a change of pace from his previous behavior, he takes a furious stride forward as if he's going to beat the crap out of him.

An instinctive warning that this is dangerous hits Kliffman in the head.

You can't beat the devil.

You won't win against Reinhardt either.

Still, your talent should be worthy of the name.

You have to make the impossible possible.

You have to do what you couldn't do before.

There's only one thing to do.

Winning.

In order to win, Klippmann must fulfill a number of prerequisites.

However, you must avoid attacks from invisible enemies.

-shhhh!

Klippmann deflects Reinhardt's outstretched fist with a slight twist of the shoulder.

But the attack continues. The trajectory of the low kick as he switches stances is unavoidable.

Avoided invisibility.

But there's an inevitable offense coming.

If so, then. Two.

You have to take the hits that you would normally take and run away from.

-Billion!

That kick from Reinhardt took a nice leg kick, right into the meat of the thigh.

He didn't think it would hold, and when Cliffman, who was supposed to bounce, didn't, Reinhardt had an opening.

An opportunity presents itself.

You've dodged the unseen and withstood attacks you shouldn't have.

If so, next. Three.

If your talent is to win unwinnable battles.

The ability to penetrate the previously impenetrable, to break through your opponent's enchantment-enhanced defenses.

You need a strong punch.

Like the superpower of self-suggestion.

The cause may be different, but the effect should be the same.

A name that makes the impossible possible.

Talent to win.

Combat.

It should work the same miracles, different from causation, as self-implication has worked miracles.

Self-implication makes a lot of things possible.

The talent of combat should enable only one thing.

It's a relatively narrow condition that makes it possible to win.

Since we have such a narrow condition, we'll need to have a more powerful output.

-curl!

Everyone's eyes widened as they watched the blue flames explode from Kliffman's body.

"!"

Blue energy surged from Kliffman's body.

-Bam!

"Boom!"

Reinhardt bounced back from the punch that Klippmann threw.

-Thump!

"Uh....... Huh?"

A dumbfounded look on Olivia's face, as if she didn't know what she'd just seen.

"......."

Ellem's nonchalant demeanor, as if she somehow knew this would happen.

"......Xfoot."

Reinhardt's monosyllabic patter, a very complex mix of emotions, as he stares blankly at the ceiling of the rehearsal hall.

Reinhardt had a complicated look on his face, like he knew it was going to happen, but now that it did, it was too much.

And.

"Big......!"

Until Cliffman's scheduled bloodletting.

That day.

The on-call chaplaincy received one more patient.

Episode 375.

"Why are all first graders monsters?"

After dropping off a stunned Cliffman in the on-call chaplain's office, Olivia muttered in disbelief.

Olivia was stunned to hear that Ludwig, the other stunned first-year, had done the exact same thing as Klippmann yesterday against the violinist Tana. Ellen glared at her at Olivia's comment.

"That's not what you're supposed to say."

"No....... I wasn't this bad, what are you guys doing?"

Olivia was stunned, and it was something that had never happened before in the history of the Temple.

Two enchantments awakened within a day of each other.

Ellen, Reinhardt, Ludwig, and Klippmann.

Four of the first-year students used the enchantment as a self-power.

It should have been unheard of at the point Ellen did it, but four freshmen did it.

Savior Tana, who was checking on Ludwig in the recovery room, found the situation just as ridiculous, but let Klippmann off the hook for now.

"I don't think there's a problem, but......."

Just as Olivia was frozen, Xavier Tana was freaked out by Ludwig, and equally baffled by the fact that Klippmann had awakened to his enchantment within a day's time.

"What the hell are you first graders......."

I thought I had a pretty good grade with two outliers, but now I have two more.

Ellen stared at Reinhardt in silence.

Cliff got what he wanted. And Reinhardt did everything he could to bring out his talent.

That's true.

But Ellen couldn't help but notice that Reinhardt didn't look too happy.

Klippmann didn't look too proud to be outed.

Maybe you're regretting something, maybe you're questioning whether it's right.

Ellen had a complicated look on her face that was hard to understand.

\* \* \*

Klippmann and Ludwig have awakened their enchantments.

Not surprisingly, completing the event gave you 2,000 achievement points. I need another 5,000 points to awaken the next talent, which is Ability Resistance. I wanted to keep some of the points in reserve, so I actually planned to earn more Achievement Points before unlocking the next Talent.

The effect of the increased Enchantment efficiency will also come into play.

Naturally, rumors about Klippmann spread throughout the Royal Class, not just the first year.

Riana seemed to hear the story and rushed to the recovery room to check on Cliffman.

I don't know if Cliff would have been able to enchant if I hadn't dealt with him. I do know that if the Gate is going to blow up, I need them to be strong. History has changed too much, and I don't want to be swept up in the Gate Crisis and have my first graders die unexpectedly.

But not only did Cliff get stronger, so did Riana.

If their goal is to kill me and the gate situation goes away, I'm in a very strange situation where I'm helping the guy who wants to kill me.

However.

Even if I hadn't done anything, Cliffman would have realized the enchantment anyway.

"Looks like they're close to finishing the potion that increases sensitivity to magic. That'll help the kids who specialize in close combat, and it'll help Klippmann and Ludwig."

I nodded, listening to Herriot's explanation.

Moonshine's development is nearing completion, so combat majors should be able to quickly learn and get used to enchantments with her help.

"I never thought this would actually get made."

"And the other?"

"That's almost done, too."

Power cartridges are also in the works, though not as much as Moonshine.

As far as I'm concerned, the Royal Class first years don't make sense.

Four of the first graders awakened to magical enhancement on their own.

A group of magic students are on the verge of creating two objects that could change the course of human history.

The reality of Royal Class right now is that only combat majors and magic majors are doing crazy things.

The power of humanity has accumulated, and if the Gate does not open, the accumulated power will be directed at me.

There are other problems as well. Too much brilliance can attract the wrong kind of attention.

Harriet sips her black tea and sighs heavily.

"You don't really think this is all due to your foresight, do you?"

I asked her to make something ridiculous, and she made it, so it's my ball. Harriet glares at me, as if I shouldn't think that way.

I've done this, so you think I'm going to ask you to make even weirder things in the future.

"Sure."

"......What the hell, I thought you were going to freak out."

This was not the reaction I was expecting, and I could tell that Herriot was a little taken aback.

He thought he'd order something even more bizarre this time.

Harriet sips her tea and stares out at the terrace.

"Uh, Riana......."

There it was, Riana running through the Temple in the dead of winter.

After seeing Klippmann's condition, I felt like I was back to personal training. Because running is not something you want to do with someone else.

Herriot follows her with his eyes as she runs off down the walkway.

He looked sad.

Riana has changed, Kliffman has changed. They're all getting stronger.

"I can't help it....... but it seems like everyone is changing......."

The presence of the Demon King is changing everyone. It's not like you're just training for the sake of training, practicing for the sake of practicing.

Someone has been given a special purpose. They're pushed harder because they have a purpose, and they're doing things they wouldn't normally do.

These changes seemed sad and scary to Herriot.

\* \* \*

The Empire has recently experienced a very big event. The attack on Levaina by demons was one such event. The victims of this unfortunate attack included many of the Empire's highest nobles and most influential figures.

This was the third guerrilla war between the demons, fueling their fear and animosity toward the king.

However, there were a few people who knew the truth about the third raid.

Not surprisingly, Charlotte de Gradias was among them. Bertus outlined the revolutionary forces and, disguised as demons, blew them away.

There are a few people who know the truth, but not many, and they are the ones who will take the secret to their graves.

Spring Palace.

Charlotte took a sip of her milk tea.

"Why are you here?"

Bertus, who was sitting across from Charlotte, took a sip of his black tea and gave her a subtle smile.

It's not like they're visiting each other's palaces.

But Bertus was visiting Charlotte's palace now, and as this was not a common occurrence, Charlotte had no qualms about letting him into the Palace of Spring.

"Well, why do you think you're here?"

Charlotte's eyes narrowed at Bertus' words.

"I'm here to see what a loser looks like, that's all I can think of."

Loser.

At that, Bertus's mouth twitched in surprise.

He hadn't realized that Charlotte would be so receptive to the word.

Not only did he defeat one of the Empire's greatest enemies, the Revolutionaries, with no losses to the Empire, he swallowed them whole.

It's not something that can be publicized, but Bertus has done a great job.

Monarchs are expected to be efficient. Regardless of his personal affection for his children, the emperor will choose the most capable to be the next emperor.

Bertus has proven himself capable.

And Charlotte proved nothing.

Since my release from the Demon Castle, I've spent so much time dealing with the aftermath that I haven't fully recovered from it.

Charlotte meekly admitted her defeat.

"I thought you thought you were being unfair. I'm surprised."

"It's not fair. But it's also true that I can't, or won't, try to do as well as you, even with all the problems I have."

If only he hadn't been kidnapped by the demon castle, if only the demon's spirit hadn't possessed him, if only he hadn't been so obsessed with finding the child.

We can hypothesize, but it's pointless. Charlotte chose to do something, and in that moment she had already decided to risk something, and in the end she gained nothing, and Bertus, who had been acting on behalf of the empire, gained something.

So Charlotte accepts defeat, even though the outcome is not a foregone conclusion.

"Maybe it was all meaningless.

Even if you are freed from the demonic spirit, you still face a future in which you must die because you have been eliminated from the race to the throne.

There's nothing but death this way, nothing but death that way.

Born into a world of privilege, Charlotte and Bertus are destined to live a life of win or die.

Bertus narrows his eyes and looks at Charlotte.

"Isn't it unfair, if it was me who was kidnapped instead of you, maybe the outcome wouldn't have been this way?"

"I don't think it's fair, and I don't think it's fair, and I don't think it's going to work if we're all complaining about it, right?"

So when Bertus scratched her with a win in the bag like that, Charlotte didn't get angry or lose her temper.

We have a result, and we accept it.

If anything, this is a weak defense.

If you get down on your knees and beg for your life, you might as well be deported. Something tells me I'd rather not say that.

Bertus stares at Charlotte, who seems to be accepting the outcome with aplomb.

The smile faded from Bertus's face.

"That's not funny."

He had what he wanted, he had knocked out his only competition, but he couldn't feel any sense of victory. Bertus looked disappointed.

"Yeah, you're not having fun. It's all I can do now to make sure you don't get too triumphant. What do you think, is this kind of fun?"

What I can do now is not to do something to beat you, but to accept defeat so gracefully that you can't get a sense of victory.

That's all there is to it. At that, Bertus smiles again, this time coyly.

"If you do this, Reinhardt will have worked for nothing."

"......!"

She figured she'd find out someday. But the cruel timing of the name made Charlotte's eyes widen.

He knows about Reinhardt's rescue of Charlotte. He knows about what happened at the Palace of Spring, and if so, he knows about being the Champion of Tuan.

"I'm trying to say something."

Charlotte, who up until this point had taken whatever Bertus had to say with a grain of salt, saw hostility in his eyes.

"Ugh, the mere mention of Reinhardt's name makes you look like you want to strangle me. It must be working."

I'll just have to bring up Reinhardt in the future to provoke you, Bertus chuckled.

But Charlotte wasn't in the mood for jokes right now.

"If you touch Reinhardt, I will kill you, no matter what. No matter what. No matter what."

"That's a plea that sounds like a threat."

"......."

It's a thorn in her side, but she's begging him not to hurt Reinhardt. Bertus looks at Charlotte and smiles.

I've come to terms with my own insecurities.

But in the end, you lose and you're left with yourself.

Reinhardt is desperate.

"Do me a favor."

"......what?"

"Kneel or whatever. Just don't touch Reinhardt."

Bertus looks at Charlotte with a sinister smile.

"Do me a favor."

"......."

Charlotte stares into Bertus's eyes. Charlotte seems to consider for a moment, then slowly rises from her chair.

Then he took a few steps toward Bertus and dropped his knees to the ground.

In your own palace.

Charlotte kneels before Bertus.

Keeping her head down, Charlotte says still.

"He was just trying to help me, I might die, he was trying to save me, that's all. He was....... He wasn't trying to be your enemy, he wasn't trying to pretend with you. He just couldn't leave me alone....... That's why he did it......."

Reinhard was not your enemy, nor did he intend to be. He was just trying to save his friend.

"Reinhardt to....... Leave him alone. Please....... Please......."

Charlotte kneels and pleads with Bertus in a trembling voice.

Bertus stares at Charlotte as she does so.

This is Charlotte de Gradias, always arrogant and proud. She was Charlotte de Gradias, who could stab you and not draw a drop of blood. Her backstabbing was routine, and she was always cruel and brutal to her opponents. And her tactics were always intimidating.

I thought Charlotte would be a huge obstacle when she came back.

But after the demonization.

Too many things have changed.

Charlotte de Gradias, the proud, arrogant, rival to beat, who didn't know what was going through her mind, was gone.

Only now, she's not begging for her life, she's kneeling in front of herself, begging him not to touch a boy in her class.

Ever since I got back from Demon Island.

Charlotte was like a glass that would shatter if you touched it wrong.

Taken as a princess, Charlotte de Gradias has been just a girl ever since.

As if something important had been broken in the Demon City. As if they had lost all the attitudes and purposes of life that they had been forced to acquire by living as an exalted being.

She had been searching for the mysterious child who had saved her life, and now she had no reason to look for him. All he could do was lean on Reinhardt.

In the first place, Charlotte hasn't been an enemy of Bertus for a very long time.

You haven't won.

The girl who couldn't be her enemy, who didn't want to be her enemy. A girl who was merely holding a place in the line of succession to the throne, now kneeling before a rival who had grown too big for her to handle.

I don't even know why he's kneeling, but he's trying to beg me not to touch the one person he's leaning on.

Bertus looked down at the trembling Charlotte.

Suddenly, I realize.

If it wasn't an enemy in the first place.

Maybe we don't even need to kill it.

I'm going to be dragged to the demon castle, lose everything, lose everything, fail at everything I've tried to do, and lose my life.

Victory.

was also unpleasant.

Charlotte doesn't even have a reason to kneel before him.

I should have told you to try Reinhardt once. You don't think you'll be safe if you mess with Tuan's champion. On the contrary, your political position will crumble.

It should have said.

Charlotte doesn't know that.

But just in case.

Just in case.

There's a small chance that you might actually touch Reinhardt.

That's why Charlotte bent the knee to Bertus. To erase even the tiniest possibility.

Kneeling for others, not yourself. Kneeling, head bowed, looking down at Charlotte, her slender shoulders shaking.

"Really......."

Putting down the teacup.

"That's not funny."

Bertus basked in his hollow victory.

Episode 376.

While there is no threat of war from the remnants of the demonic forces, humanity is once again in fear of demons as they wage guerrilla warfare everywhere.

There is no clear enemy stronghold in Darklands.

Demons can appear out of nowhere and attack humans at any time.

I could feel the fear spreading across the continent.

The reason for this was the return of Temple students from winter break, which hadn't even ended yet.

"The students are coming back."

"You'd think the temple would be safe."

From one of the hills along the Temple Walk, Mr. Epinhauser and I looked down on the Temple, which was now as crowded as it had been during the school year, with students returning to their homes for winter break.

Students who had gone home were returning to Temple in large numbers because they thought it would be safe.

Unaware that the demon they fear most is looking down on them from the middle of the temple.

Mr. Effinghauser didn't laugh at them or tell them I was the devil.

If he called me, it's because he had something to tell me.

"The order made a number of possible inferences about Akasha's capabilities, but none of them were certain."

"I see."

In the end, you won't know what Akasha is until you see it, or until you meet Cantus Magna.

"But I think it's safe to say that an artifact that records magic indefinitely is never going to be a good thing."

Unusual things are supposed to cause unusual things to happen.

"To truly engage Cantus Magna this time, the Order will take an unusually large risk."

The Black Order didn't know what Akasha was, but they were looking to end their longstanding acquaintance.

"Will you cooperate?"

The answer to that question was already in place.

"I'm already in the same boat, so why bother?"

Joining hands with the Black Order to bring in the Cantus Magna. Effinghauser stood still, looking down the hill.

It was time to talk about how to bring Cantus Magna into the fold. And what role the Order would play in that, and what I and my faction would need to do.

But Effinghauser was speechless.

"It can't be something you did."

"It's ......."

I knew what that meant.

A series of events leading up to the death of Duke Granz.

People don't know what the devil wants, so they think they can do anything to get it.

I raided the Crusaders and killed Leviathan Ranze.

So you could raid a small southern nation's capital and accidentally kill all of the Merchant Guild's big investors on the outskirts of town.

I don't know if Epinhauser is aware of the revolutionary forces, but I'm sure he realizes that the quality of this event is different from what we've seen before.

It also seemed to know that I didn't do it.

"Is it unfair?"

That's not a question for the Black Order, that's a question for my teacher.

At his question, I stare down at the hill.

The commotion has prompted many students to return to Temple to spend the rest of their winter break.

"I don't know."

What are you going to do about it?

There's still more work to be done.

"So, what do I do now?"

"Lich's tomb has been discovered in Darklands."

"Rich?"

"Yeah."

It was too abrupt.

"Of course adventurers will flock to it."

Adventurers were still scouring the Darklands, and the cursed Tiamata had been found there.

In the process of discovering things and uncovering new treasures, Richie's dungeon was discovered.

"The spellbooks in Ritchie's tomb will be coveted by Cantus Magna....... Is that so?"

"That may be, but I doubt the Lich has developed any great sobriety. Sure, he's a powerful wizard, far beyond the norm, but that's not something Cantus Magna would covet."

Eppinhauser's reference to Ritchie gives me a sense of the Black Order and Cantus Magna's familiarity with magic.

"But what's important to note is that while Richie's grave was discovered two months ago, it's only been known for about a week that it's actually Richie's grave."

The first discoverers of the dungeon would have been killed by the lich or died in the dungeon before they could report their discovery.

Perhaps you've been exploring in the direction of the unreturned adventurers, and the surviving adventurers have just learned of Richie's grave.

"The Order intends to fortify the tomb of the Reach."

"Enhance?"

"Yes. We plan to make it known that what's there is more than a lich. We'll manipulate rumors to make it seem even more mysterious and strange than it is. We'll build mazes around the dungeon, create anomalies, unleash ominous minions, chimeras, and homunculi. Hopefully, adventurers will think they've encountered an Akrich, albeit a fictional one that's the stuff of legend."

Bait the hook.

A decoy named Akrich.

"Adventurers will come in droves, and some of the living will be sent with spells of an unearthly quality. Ominous, but too great a discovery to ignore."

"......."

Cantus Magna will not covet the scrolls in Lich's tomb.

That's why the Black Order sets up traps to make the discovered Reach dungeon appear to be the home of something far more powerful and dangerous. Even the insignificant book that the miraculous survivors flee with in their hands is a major discovery for the wizarding world.

It was about artificially sowing sobriety or the arts into the world.

A few books, but what magic or treasures lie beneath the surface?

I'm sure word will spread, and if it does, I'm sure Cantus Magna will know about it.

"Wait. Then it's not Cantus Magna that's the problem, it's the other adventurers and mages."

At that, Effinghauser stares at me.

"I told you, Order is taking a very big risk on this one."

He was prepared for a large group of adventurers, and he didn't care if they lost their lives.

Of course, there's also the problem of adventurers who know it's a dangerous place and go there blinded by the promise of a quick buck.

The cantus magna is a structure where people keep dying until the real big fish is caught.

Richie's grave has been found.

But apart from the lich, it disguises the tomb as the tomb of a very powerful being.

"So Rich in that tomb is....... That would be a weird situation."

Isn't it a situation where you're standing still and outside forces are rampaging? Isn't it a situation where you're standing still in your tomb, researching magic, and suddenly adventurers are knocking on your door talking about Akrichini?

"Don't worry about that. We've already agreed to cooperate."

"Cooperate?"

"Yeah, I didn't kill him because a grave needs an owner."

No.

I'm going to break into the lich's tomb and write something here.

It's okay, make yourself comfortable (not in your own home).

Was it like this?

I felt sorry for Richie, who didn't have a face.

"The tomb will need to be enlarged, and we'll need to work on the binding and enchantments around the dungeon. Even as we speak, the Order is working on it."

Draw in Cantus Magna.

The Black Order was willing to unleash countless arcane arts on the world to do so. They planned to add to Lich's dungeon, making it more complex and dangerous than its original structure.

"What can I say....... who runs a dungeon to attract cantus magna....... or something like that."

"It's going to happen, so to speak."

Running a dungeon.

Of course, that's what the Black Order does, not me, but the means to an end is a bit messy.

Richie's tomb has been discovered, and after subduing the original owner and forcibly expanding the tomb to make it more dangerous, he waits for his true prey to arrive.

The dungeon loses its value the moment it is dug up, and no one should ever penetrate its depths, so the dungeon must continue to suck in adventurers, occasionally letting them escape with treasure.

But in the process, it's very likely that you'll send out an expedition that's not a cantus magna, but a bunch of powerhouses from the wrong group.

That's why the Black Order wants to attempt to erase Cantus Magna from the world forever, even though they know it's very dangerous.

It's a very dangerous thing to do, turning off continent-level aggro, and a lot of adventurers will die.

"But....... Wouldn't it be easier to pose as a genius with lots of magic, or a reclusive wizard....... Wouldn't that be more comfortable?"

Do we really need to go down this path?

Wouldn't it be nice to have a storyline where a reclusive archmage emerges from hiding? He's spent a lot of time researching and developing a lot of magic, and I don't think he'd be attracted to unnecessary aggro.

"Then you'll be hunted down by warlocks with tons of gold. You'll end up in a fight, too. Only it'll be bigger."

"Ah."

The latter is the more dangerous of the two: adventurers seeking treasure, or a reclusive archmage who has developed a myriad of secrets.

The Wizards' Guild can threaten you to turn over your research, and if you don't, they'll hunt you down as a Wizards' Guild, not as a group of adventurers.

If anything, Epinhauser's comment about the scale of the fight being bigger for the human mage turning off the aggro was eerie.

The work of the Darklands is what happens beyond the borders of the human world.

Because of that psychological distance, a significant number of humans are turned off to some degree by whatever is there.

But if you tell them there's a dangerous warlock inside their world, they'll stomp on it like it's fire underfoot.

Epinhouser's point of view that building a dungeon would be a less bloody way to go made sense to me.

The Black Order creates fake dungeons to lure people in.

But it's far more dangerous than a real dungeon, and it's likely to hold powerful treasures.

But it's unlikely that the Black Order is doing this to benefit themselves.

We had to want something, too.

"First of all, if you guys have any magic that can affect the configuration of the dungeon or the external environment, I'm all for it."

"Yes."

"And the most important thing."

EpinHauser sees me.

"The original owner, a lich, is a powerful mage and has agreed to cooperate with us, but we'll need a powerful force in case of emergencies. The Order will be sending one, but I'd like you to send one as well, so that you and I can each be in charge of the dungeon, so to speak."

They weren't wrong.

By the way.

After all, you're in the owner's house talking to the owner's doctor.

I feel like something more than trash.

"Let's talk about it."

A plan to attract Cantus Magna.

Running a fake dungeon.

I didn't know how this would play out, but I knew that word would have to spread as quickly as possible to attract Cantus Magna.

And one who can claim to be the watchman of the dungeon.

But who's going to do that for you?

\* \* \*

High Epiaxis.

"I'll do it."

Antirhoniously agreed to hear the details.

Calling the Vampire Council to discuss the matter, Antirrhynchus answered, much to everyone's consternation.

It's great that the council is happening a day after I forwarded the request to Lucinil.

I think we've made everyone but Antirrhinus look bad.

Eleris, Galarsh, Lerouen, and Lucinil all stared at Antrian.

What's wrong with you?

The looks on their faces were like this.

"......Don't you think you're being too hasty?"

At my question, Antirrhinus chuckled hollowly.

"If anything, I think it's a very good position to be in."

"Good?"

Lucinil shook his head.

"First of all, the idea of luring Cantus Magna by making an already existing dungeon a more dangerous place than it is known to be is amusing, but didn't you say that you would eventually lay out a number of baits for him?"

The Black Order was willing to take the risk and leak a lot of the spells and arts. And I, for one, am willing to help with any spellbooks that might be useful in the bunkers of the Demon Castle.

"I'm not sure why you wouldn't want the job, given that you'd have access to a whole bunch of visions to use as bait."

a.

Was that how you approached it?

"It's the vision of the Black Order....... Of course, it's limited in scope......."

Lerouen nodded in agreement, and the others looked convinced.

Being a dungeon manager is not a chore, it's a position that gives you access to an unlimited number of banned books and visions that the Black Order can use as bait. These are the things they've decided to bait the world with anyway, and they're not going to let Antony see them.

You're not a dungeon watchman, you're a glimpse into the visions of the Black Order.

This meant that it was just eating the raw meat and had no other intentions.

By the way.......

There's something subtly crush-worthy about being overly honest. Still a bit cheesy, though.

Antirrhinus, don't you think you're actually not thinking about it?

"I'll leave it to the Lord of Saturday to take care of that, then, and I'll communicate with the Lord of Wednesday later about the time and place you'll need to meet with the Order members."

"I look forward to your arrival, Great One."

I was expecting a lot of back and forth about who's going to do this, and that Elise or Lucinil would end up doing it begrudgingly.

The greedy old man was happy to take on the job, and it was done without much discussion.

Episode 377.

Eleris didn't look too pleased.

They say it's to catch Cantus Magna, but it's really a plan to artificially create a dungeon that digs an ant-hole and sucks in tons of adventurers.

I'm not sure why I'd want to worry about a bunch of guys getting their heads blown off.

It's bizarre that someone would agree to something that would eventually kill them.

"I'll be back when I'm done."

"Sure."

Antrianus, Galarsh, and Leruen cast their teleports and soon left.

It's just me, Lucinil, and Elise in the council room.

"And Radia?"

"I told him to wait in his room."

I think I'm gonna get psychotic or something if I stay out here in the cold and dark for too long. Are you okay?

I don't really care how Radia is doing, but I think about her when I'm here.

I'm sure Elise is taking good care of her somehow.

It's almost like....... I guess you could say I'm being bred.

Anyway, that's not the problem.

"Okay, Elise and Rusinil, I need you to go somewhere with me for a minute."

"Anything else?"

I nodded at the silver-haired kid's question.

"Let's go to the Demon Castle."

"You mean Demon Castle? That's....... Oh, come to think of it, it's......."

"Yeah. You said there was a shelter or something."

"Yeah, I'm going to go there."

You'll need to organize your fake dungeon and see if there's any magic that can help with camouflage.

But I'm blind to magic, so I don't know if there is such a thing in the Demon Castle. Or if they do, it's already known magic, and the Order might ask me why I brought it.

So, take a couple of Archmage-grade road vampires and you should be able to find something.

\* \* \*

I had told Lucinil about the bunker, and she had told Elise, so I knew about it. I don't know if the other Lord Vampires were informed,

I can't even get to the demon castle bunker on my own.

There are still garrisons there, and since I can't use magic, I can't descend to the sixth floor, where the labyrinth is.

But it's a different story when Lucinil and Elise come along.

The outskirts of Demon City, arrived not through a warp gate but by using a series of teleports.

"That's big."

Lucinil's jaw dropped at the majesty of the Demon City's walls from afar.

A castle that eventually fell.

"Let's go."

The three of us made our way to Mawang Castle, taking care not to be seen by the garrison, including invisibility and noise suppression.

"You don't have to find dangerous magic, it doesn't have to be a dungeon trap or binding. Something that's not too dangerous, but could serve as bait for Cantus Magna."

"Okay."

"Yes, degradation."

The Black Order will put out bait, but we must put out bait as well. Whatever the Black Order's true purpose, it is an ally until we find Cantus Magna and Akasha.

We'll have to think beyond that, but for now, Akasha is our priority.

If I were a mage, I'd think that I couldn't just scatter those bloody grimoires around, but I'm not a mage.

I knew it was valuable, but I didn't want to waste it.

However, I can't take too many books with me. I don't want Charlotte to realize that the book is missing until later, even if she looks at it and realizes that I took it.

Naturally, the garrison didn't recognize us, and I, who knew the way, led the way.

The interior of Mawang was also very large, so we were on the move for quite a while.

The garrison had explored nearly every part of the city except the Labyrinth. And the commander had given up on the search for the Labyrinth, and Charlotte hadn't questioned him about it.

The garrison will soon withdraw, claiming to have found nothing.

Eleris looked at the Demon King and made a sad face.

He hated war, but for some reason he was the only one on the council to swear allegiance to the Demon King, and he became a spy for the Yellow Emperor before returning to the Demon City.

I couldn't tell what Elise was thinking.

"I need to get to the fifth floor of the basement."

You know where to go to find the entrance to the labyrinth.

We walked diligently.

"I don't even need to use invisibility. There's no one there at all, right?"

"I see."

Rusinil let out an exclamation of disbelief. Of course, that doesn't mean I've turned off the invisibility and noise canceling.

The commander, Count Alfrid, seems to think that Charlotte's failure to pursue the matter has given him a virtual free pass.

So exploration has stopped altogether. The garrison is merely hanging around the Demon Castle, waiting to be evacuated.

We soon descended to the fifth level of the demon castle, the warren, and reached the entrance to the labyrinth.

"It's not that big, is it?"

"Isn't that what it's all about?"

"There's this place......."

"It's a labyrinth, but apparently the way is only open if you have an Archdemon."

At the time, I wasn't sure if she had opened the way for Charlotte or me. But unless you're coming with an Archdemon, this passage leads to a labyrinth.

Fortunately, the labyrinth guided me to the exit, even while still in Reinhardt form.

A short distance down the circular staircase, I saw a door at the end of a long, straight hallway.

At least I know that no matter what I look like, the Labyrinth will take me to the right place.

But what if Charlotte came alone?

I wasn't sure about that yet.

Elise and Lucinil followed.

-delay

I opened the door and found myself in the space I had reached earlier with Charlotte and Saviolin Tana.

"Wow, what's all this?"

Lucinil's eyes widened as she reached the giant cavity and looked around.

Elise was equally bewildered by the passageways and rooms.

"Mawang Castle....... Since when is this place......."

Elise muttered to herself. Supplies for living, and bedrooms and kitchens and alchemical reagents and libraries. Lucinil and Eleris were stunned.

"It certainly looks like it was built to serve as a refuge....... No one but an Archdemon can enter it......."

If I hadn't lost my memory, this is where I would have come in.

How survival affected Bali in the original is still a thorny issue.

"Enough with the admiration, let's find a spellbook."

"Yes, degradation."

"Nothing too dangerous, but you said it was a grimoire that Cantus Magna would covet, or a trap or conundrum that would be useful in a dungeon?"

"Yes."

"Good."

Lucinil seemed to ponder my terms, and then he and Elise went into the library to look around.

I couldn't stay still, so I started rummaging through the bookshelves in the library.

"Wow....... There's a lot of stuff."

"I see."

Honestly, this wasn't just a few bookshelves. It was more like a library.

I thought it was all magic books, but when I tried to find non-magical books, I found them too. There were also some books on swordsmanship and martial arts.

"Hey, Archdemon."

I could hear Lucinil calling out to me.

"Yes. Why?"

"Why is half the battle."

"Yes, why?"

"Oh, that. Anyway, you said you lost your memory and didn't even know this place existed?"

"Yes."

Through the bookshelves, I could see Rusinil's face, puffed up and worried.

"So if you hadn't lost your memory, you'd be in here?"

"You did, didn't you?"

"Hmmm......."

Rusinil shakes his head.

"Wouldn't the Great Demon King have been spared if he had fled here?"

"I would have thought so, too."

This would have been a place for Valier Junior, not a place for the former Demon King. So instead of fleeing to the Labyrinth, Valier stayed in the Demon Castle to fight Lagan Artorius.

It would make no sense for a monarch to flee when the allied forces are so close to the city of Demon King.

Rusinil nodded, wondering if that logic didn't make sense.

"Well, I guess I didn't do my job here, because you didn't get in after all."

This bunker lost its role when I became a junior in Bali.

And it wasn't until quite a while later that I realized it existed.

Lucinil scanned the bookshelves, pondering, looking at one book after another, putting them back, telekinetically levitating them to her side. Eleris was also looking at the bookshelves with a troubled expression on her face.

Here I found a book on the art of seduction, which I immediately gave to Charlotte, though I thought it might be of use to Lucinil as well.

The library is huge, so I wonder if there's another book on seduction that I didn't find? Well, if this were a real library, there might be a backup book or something, but this isn't a library.

I couldn't find anything that fit my criteria myself, so I was looking to see if there were any other books on seduction that might be helpful to Lucinil.

"Hey, Archdemon."

"Why do you keep calling me that, and why don't you call me Archdemon?"

"Then it's Bali."

"Why?"

Lucinil sees me from across the room, a few books floating in a circle.

"You know what? Magic is blind."

No this?

I was just trying to help.

But he didn't seem to be posting, he seemed genuinely curious.

If you can't tell, I'm telling you to stop wasting your energy and go rest.

I'm kind of curious about what the preserved food here tastes like, but I don't think there's a book for that, and my job is to point the way, not to find it.

I'm trying to do that.

[Introduction to Matchmaking].

A book in an inconspicuous place caught my eye.

I had the same book.

And then I realized why we had the same book.

Same book, different language in the title.

The title is written in a demonic language, not a common language.

A demonic language version of the Book of Engagement.

"Lucinil, have you ever heard of something called the art of engagement?"

"Huh? Engagement?"

I look at Lucinil, clutching a copy of the Demon Language Primer.

"Look at this for now."

Get ready to say thank you, you little old lady.

\* \* \*

Unfortunately, I didn't get a chance to thank Rusinil.

It wasn't because Lucinil hadn't read the primer in the demon language.

"I know."

"Is that ......?"

After skimming through the primer, Rusinil said.

"It's true that the arcane arts of dealing with spirits are taboo, but I've been alive for years and I don't know these things?"

Lucinil wanted to have a soul, so he would have studied the magic of souls.

"By no means is this a common spellbook, but unfortunately it is one I know."

Lucinil strokes the surface of the Introduction to Conjuration book.

The magic she already knew would mean that even with the spell, Lucinil would not be able to fulfill her wishes.

"I could fuse my soul with someone else's, but I don't have a soul, and then I would be absorbed, not fused with another being, so I couldn't try."

The very idea of fusing different souls doesn't apply to Lucinil.

After all, magic that deals with souls is useless against soulless beings.

So what is a soul in the first place.

I hadn't thought about it, because I would have it.

Only Lucinil, who did not have it, studied the soul in desperation.

Lucinil looks at me and smiles coyly.

"By the way, you were thinking of me, thank you."

"It's not like that."

"Oh, so you're this guy. Okay. Cute."

What's with the tickling?

By the way, Lucinil is probably the one who has been thinking about souls the most. I found a book on spiritism and thought it might be helpful for Lucinil. .......

The reality is quite the opposite.

If anyone knows the most about soul magic, it's Lucinil. She must have studied magic for a very long time to have it.

So.

The person most likely to have an answer to Charlotte's problem is Lucinil.

"I'd like to ask you something."

"What is it?"

Lucinil shook his head, saying, "Go ahead.

"Say you have a soul that has fused two souls, can you return it to its original state, the state it was in before the fusion?"

Research is already underway on the subject of matchmaking.

But Lucinil had already done all the research. So Lucinil would know everything there is to know about the art of betrothal.

If the situation is urgent, Lucinil might be able to lend a hand to Charlotte. I'll have to think about how to explain this and what approach to take.

But.

"Will it work?"

With those innocent words, all my expectations were shattered.

\* \* \*

Lucinil doesn't know what I was thinking asking that.

But, as if it were a given, I was told that it couldn't be.

"I could mix two glasses of water into one cup and then divide it into two glasses, but that wouldn't make it two glasses of water again, would it?"

"...... Is that a concept?"

"It's actually a little different, but it's not that different."

You can't return something that has already been mixed and unified to its pre-mixed state.

I remembered Charlotte jumping for joy when she received a book on the art of marriage.

But if what Lucinil says is true, her research into the art of seduction won't get Charlotte the results she wants.

If so, what should I do?

If Charlotte's soul became inseparable the moment it joined with the Demon's, will she have to spend the rest of her life like this, waiting to be consumed by the Demon's soul one day?

"Why do you want to know that, anyway?"

Should I say?

That the devil's spirit still resides within the spirit of the princess?

Lucinil might know the answer to what to do, and to tell you the truth, I should at least talk about how I want to do it.

You should be good to go.

If there's no way, it's better to say there's no way.

Now I wanted to be sure of something.

"The Ancestral Demon has fused part of his soul into someone else's."

"......what?"

At my words, Lucinil's mouth dropped open in disbelief. As if she had heard something unbelievable.

"No....... You did that?"

"I'm pretty sure it's circumstantial."

"So if you took a piece of your own soul and planted it in someone, and then....... and they were fine?"

"I don't know about that, but......."

I thought what the Devil did to Charlotte was horrible, but Lucinil seemed to take it quite the opposite way.

The insanity of splitting one's own soul was already a terrible thing to do to oneself.

"Is having your soul divided too much to bear?"

"It's a lot to take in, and it's a good thing I didn't go crazy like a horse. I probably wouldn't have been able to stay sane....... What the hell happened to the Ancestral Demon King that ate you?"

We don't know if Ancestor Valie was crazy. But judging by the way the Demon War rolled, it's unlikely he was driven to madness or lost his taste altogether.

Planting his soul in Charlotte was a huge risk, even for the Devil.

If so, then.

No wonder Izzy was almost lost to the demonic spirit that had taken over Charlotte's body. She didn't recognize me, she just seemed to be going crazy.

The demon somehow managed to maintain his sanity, but the spirit that merged with Charlotte's can't maintain Izzie's?

After hearing my story, Rusinil was stunned.

"That means....... He knew he was going to lose the Demon War....... I'm guessing you've made arrangements to resurrect him somehow. I don't know if that's possible......."

Lucinil seemed to think what the demon was trying to do was too risky.

"You want to resurrect that demon's soul in its entirety?"

I shook my head at Lucinil's question.

"Nope. I'd like to get rid of it."

"......?"

What the hell is this?

Lucinil looked at me with that look.

Episode 378.

Lucinyl is a low-intervention style.

If I'm doing things that have nothing to do with rebuilding the realm, so be it. It's not that I don't care about what I'm doing, it's just that I'd rather help where I can.

"Look, in a situation like this, I don't know if it's normal, I don't know if I'd call it normal, but isn't it child's play, Archdemon? Even a homunculus vampire knows that?"

But this time, it didn't make too much sense to me.

Your father's spirit has entered someone's soul, and you want to get rid of it.

Lucinil stares at me. Like she's trying to read something unreadable.

Do I have to tell an unbelievable story like I did with Elise?

"I don't think you're doing this because you're afraid you won't be able to eat him if he comes back to life....... Well, sure. I'm sure you have your own ideas."

Lucinil crossed her arms as if she didn't want to know.

"Anyway, I don't know whose soul you planted a piece of your soul in, but my opinion is the same: if you split it back up, you're going to end up with two people who are mixed up, and you can't go back to the way you were. Of course, I can't guarantee that the split person will be sane or not."

There's no going back.

Does that mean there is no answer other than coexistence?

"Then who will be the master of the body, the master of the soul....... can't be determined?"

"Hmmm....... I don't know what you're talking about, but are you wondering if the person whose soul is mixed with the body is in control, or if the demon is in control?"

"Yes."

Charlotte's body is sometimes overwhelmed by the demon's power, and she can't help but lose her sanity.

"It's bound to crash. It's like a side effect, but it gets better over time. That's what happens when different souls and spirits merge."

Over time, it will be fine.

Am I sure it's going to be okay?

"I don't know if that's the right way to put it, but it's going to go away and it's going to be okay, and it's not really a question of who's in control or not in the first place, it's just going to be one, it's going to be like two and one at the same time........ kind of thing."

Charlotte and the demon's soul have already become one.

Time will tell.

To be complete is to be mixed with the devil.

"Perhaps in time, the demon's self and someone else's self will be fully combined, and as you say, it's impossible to get rid of the demon's soul and self."

Unstoppable.

Unless Charlotte dies, the demon is revived.

Charlotte's symptoms are caused by her becoming one with the demon's spirit.

But it's impossible to separate them because they're already mixed together.

"But you, you seem to know this person a little bit, and apparently you've witnessed some of these battles for control."

"Yeah....... Well."

"Hmm, so you've never talked to the devil himself?"

None.

I fought it, but obviously, it had gone completely insane that day.

"I tried to talk to him, but it didn't work - he didn't even recognize me."

Apparently, I had shown Valerie's form to the demon that had taken over Charlotte's body, but it didn't recognize me at all. So I had no choice but to fight.

At my words, Lucinil shakes her head.

"Hmmm, so the side that got separated lost its mind. They couldn't communicate at all?"

"Yes."

"Then the soul of the separated demon has gone mad."

Is that what happened?

Then what?

"What happens then?"

"Hmmm......."

We can't return Charlotte to her original state.

"I'm sure it'll get better in time, the soul adapts to live after all, and the madness will subside."

It will get better over time.

The answer was surprisingly simple.

But Charlotte realizes that she can't just be Charlotte anymore.

You're Charlotte, but you're also Balie, the Ancestral Demon.

Rusinil shakes his head.

"Well, if the attacks become frequent enough, you'll be nearing full fusion, and you'll have demonic consciousness. Are there any signs of that? Like, demonic speech, or recognizing you.......? or something?"

To be one with the devil means to be one with the devil's ego.

As the fusion stabilizes as the demon's madness from the effects of the soul split subsides, Charlotte absorbs the demon's consciousness.

In other words, it has a memory.

"Not at all....... at all."

But the Charlotte I've seen hasn't shown any signs of that.

If the demon's memory had returned and the two selves had merged, he wouldn't have tried to resolve the situation in the first place.

The tears, anger, and sadness I saw in Charlotte's eyes were all real because everything she did was an act.

You can't assume that Charlotte is hiding everything with the memories and consciousness of the Ancestor Demon. Lucinil crossed her arms and frowned.

"Well, it's not uncommon for a split soul to go insane and lose all sense of self....... Hmm. But a demon's soul can't be that weak."

You've fused your souls, but one of you is so weak that your consciousness is completely lost.

But when I saw Lucinil's reaction that the Devil couldn't have done that, I remembered something.

Words.

Obviously, I used an unicorn.

Words are not magic.

It's clear that my words have somehow affected Charlotte's condition and the demonic spirit that has taken up residence in her.

"I recently had a seizure per se, but....... I didn't go crazy."

Charlotte had one recent power attack.

"Uhm....... Really? Did you talk to the demon?"

"No, the original owner of the body was maintaining the ego."

Charlotte came to me shaking with fear after a power attack. But she wasn't clearly insane, and she didn't feel like she was taking on someone else's identity.

"Hmmm....... What is that?"

Rusinil didn't seem to understand what I was saying at all.

"Did you really lose your ego so badly that you couldn't care less about soul fusion?"

Lucinil doesn't believe that the Ancestral Demon King's magical skills and understanding of the art of betrothal could have been of such a high caliber, and in fact, Lucinil can only assume that the Demon King's misuse of the art of betrothal led to this outcome.

No.

The Demon King has used the Art of Engagement properly.

There would be seizures, but there would be a process of gradually fusing with Charlotte's soul, becoming one.

The day you first awakened your spirit.

The first words I used.

Disappear from Charlotte's body.

I definitely said that.

Charlotte did have one seizure afterward, but it didn't overtake her sanity.

The demon's soul and Charlotte's soul are inseparable.

Because.

Did my superpower make the demon's ego disappear, not his soul?

"That's weird......."

If so, I no longer have to try to save Charlotte.

I had already saved Charlotte in that moment.

The demon's insane self is gone, and only the demon's power remains.

Charlotte's task is not to separate her soul, but to adapt to the demonic power she is left with.

That was all we needed to do.

"Anyway, you seem to care more about the spirits than the demons."

Lucinil shook her head in disbelief.

"He's such a weirdo."

Of course.

In true Lucinil fashion, I didn't ask more questions.

If anything, it made me wonder on my end.

"But how do you know that so well?"

"Conjuring?"

"Yes."

Rusinil shrugs.

"Have you done an experiment or two?"

a.

That's the impression I got.

Road vampires were lunatics, weren't they?

\* \* \*

When Lucinil told me that she couldn't separate their mixed souls, it felt like the sky was falling.

But as we talked, Charlotte didn't need to do anything more.

Charlotte came to me, overcome with power but not with reason.

That in itself was proof. The power itself colors Charlotte, but her mind is intact, for the demon's ego no longer exists.

That in itself was proof that Charlotte was fine.

The marriage ceremony wasn't a clue, but it's okay if it wasn't. Charlotte will be fine from now on.

But even if you know that Charlotte is okay, you don't know if others will be.

In the end, the question is whether Charlotte can accept that her power is no longer a threat, and the question is how the empire will accept it when she's fully embraced it.

Having ominous powers, even in Chuck's eyes, is already a weakness for Charlotte.

That's something Bertus can attack at any time.

Lucinil is a master of seduction.

He seemed to have done a lot of experimenting with spirits to see what was possible. It sent chills down my spine to think of Lucinil with that innocent look on his face, manipulating his subjects with soul-touching magic.

Wouldn't it be better to be an openly shady Antirrhinus?

While Lucinil and I were chatting about this and that, Elise came out of the library with some books.

"There are so many wizards I've never seen before, it's taking me a while to choose."

Many of the spells were unrecognizable from their names, and Eleris put the book down as if it had taken her a long time to flip through them all, figure out what they were, and decide if she should take them or not. Even so, I think that's pretty fast.

In her concentration, Elise didn't seem to hear about Charlotte.

"That's a vision that's been building over the course of Darklands' history."

The visions of demons, or rather, demonic wizards, built up over a long, long time. Lucinil looks toward the library and murmurs.

"But from your point of view, I think it's better to take it all back or burn it. You didn't say you were here with a princess......."

Instead of speaking, Lucinil looks at me.

I told Lucinil that I was here with the Empress, and that we had discovered a bunker in the basement of the Demon Castle.

Why? Here with the Empress?

And what we were just talking about.

Demonic Arcane Grimoires.

Blah blah blah blah.

He looked like he got it.

"Oh, it's the devil's spirit, or something, that's why you're a princess."

"It's ......."

"You're a demonic reconstructionist and a nabal, and you're not interested at all?"

You know from everything I've said so far that I'm trying to save the princess, and I realize that saving the princess defeats all of my ostensible purposes.

"I can see why Elise is helping you."

Lucinil sighed, as if the question had been answered. Eleris felt a little embarrassed that Lucinil thought she was bound to find out at some point.

I didn't want to get carried away.

You can't believe it's come to this.

"So, what are you going to do, what the hell do you want?"

"World peace."

Lucinil narrows his brow.

"Are you asking me to believe ......?"

"That's true."

Lucinil looked at Eleris as if she didn't even want to talk to me, with all my babbling.

"That's right, Lucinil."

Eleris said with a breezy laugh.

"Even Elise, so that's really scary."

Lucinil looks back and forth between Elise and me as if to say, "Don't play.

"......No, what does this have to do with world peace, I don't understand it anymore?"

Lucinil muttered in disbelief, as it didn't look like me and Elise were messing around at all.

"I guess that's just the way it is, then."

Lucinil said to me one day.

"Um, yeah."

Lucinil nodded, as if to say, "I don't understand what you don't understand.

Episode 379.

Just when I thought Charlotte's condition was irreversible, I learned new information that she had been improving.

So let's get back to our main purpose.

Spells to help you run your dungeon, or spellbooks to catch Cantus Magna. Both Eleris and Lucinil brought a selection of spellbooks.

"I was curious about the magic behind this underground labyrinth."

A labyrinth that cannot be entered except by a designated person.

"If you put this kind of labyrinth in the dungeon you decide to run, you might be able to get adventurers lost and send them back without killing them."

"Eleris is so consistent."

Lucinil smiled coyly at Eleris, who had picked a spell that would create a lot of survivors in order to somehow reduce the casualties.

Eleris' brow narrowed slightly at Lucinil's comment.

"Lucinil, the reason the Black Order and we run dungeons is not to gain notoriety, but to spread the fame of the dungeon itself so that Cantus Magna can approach as quickly as possible, so the more survivors who don't make it to the end of the dungeon, but return with a very valuable reward, the better, because word will spread faster and more surely?"

Lucinil's eyes widened at Eleris's comment that while the goal was to reduce the number of casualties, having more survivors also served the purpose.

"Uh, yeah, I'm sure."

"Do you want to get in trouble?"

"Oh, no......."

Lucinil straightened up from her sagging position as Elyse seemed to stiffen slightly.

Eleris was intrigued by the labyrinths that had been constructed beneath the Demon Castle.

A labyrinth that's constantly reconfiguring itself and forcing people to get lost. A labyrinth with no exit in the first place.

Eleris set a large book down on the table.

"Since this is the actual exit of the maze, I figured there would be a grimoire to create it, and there was."

[Quantum maze]]

Quantum Mechanics.......

Is there......?

Is it magic quantum or something......?

What's that?

This is where the Lucinyl mindset is best.

I thought that was just the way it was.

\* \* \*

"When it comes to maze design, I don't think there's anything quite like it."

"I can't believe I'm thinking this......."

Elise and Lucinil flipped through the Quantum Maze's grimoire and marveled. Of course, I couldn't recognize any of the intricately drawn spells and formulas.

And the labyrinth that blocks the path to this bunker.

"It's actually a complex magical device that combines a lot of different magics: crystallization to defend against outside interference, dimensional magic for the internal structure, including sending everyone who enters in a different direction, magic crafting to constantly recreate and rebuild the structures and traps within, and a mix of summoning magic and alchemy to generate the monsters within."

"Honestly, I could survive for 10 years on this one spell."

"That's assuming you understand and build it right."

"I guess so."

It's not just the magic of designing a maze, it's the magic of the highest order of mazes.

It's a spell that was designed to have no exit in the first place, so all of our efforts to find it were for naught.

A dungeon that randomizes every time you enter. It wasn't a foreign concept to me.

"I wonder if Cantus Magna might covet this Quantum Maze itself?"

"It's not out of the realm of possibility."

The field of magic used to build these labyrinths is enormous, and it would be something that Cantus Magna would covet.

By nature, the spell is meant to kill intruders after they wander off, but depending on how you design it, it can be used to make people wander off for a while.

There is no compelling reason for the loss of life. As Elyse points out, the more survivors there are, the more rumors of the endless labyrinth will spread, and the more people will believe that there's a pre-arranged reward at the bottom of it.

"What's the likelihood of getting ripped off?"

Of course, you shouldn't be too trusting. There are no absolutes in life, so there's a good chance you'll end up in a labyrinth without an exit. Whether it's from the inside or the outside.

My question was answered by Lucinil.

"There's no way to do it physically, from the inside or the outside, and I don't think it's possible to do it magically without figuring out certain conditions."

"Anyway, it's hard, right?"

"Yeah, and the labyrinth itself isn't going to eat people, it's just going to give them a little boost and then send them on their way, and very few of them are going to find out what it's really about, because labyrinths aren't designed to kill people, they're designed to spill them somewhere else if they don't reach their intended destination."

The magic of the Quantum Maze, which is already very powerful and mysterious in its own right, is likely to be coveted by Cantus Magna.

And tons of other spellbooks to bait.

I was nervous.

It's too big of a gamble.

If we and the Black Order lose everything to Cantus Magna, it may actually hasten the completion of Akasha, and then there's no telling what will happen.

Nervously but cluelessly, I watched as Elise and Lucinil looked through the spellbook.

\* \* \*

Eleris will return to Castle Epiarchus, and Lucinil will join Antrianus in contacting the Black Order.

The artificially constructed dungeon and its original owner, Richie, are being semi-coerced into cooperating, and two officers, one from the Order and one from our side, Antrianus, are sent to investigate.

From now on, I'm out of the picture. If Cantus Magna comes to visit, I'm prepared for an all-out war between us.

If that actually happened, I wouldn't be much help.

Reach's tomb found in the Darklands.

And the labyrinth that will soon be built there.

Could rumors of him reach the ecliptic?

We don't know how long it will take for Cantus Magna to take the bait.

All we can do now is wait.

And another income one.

Charlotte's status is that no further action is required.

"The research is going well, but the content is too complex to analyze."

I had that conversation with Charlotte over tea in her B-class dorm room. I realize now that my research into the art of seduction is not going to help Charlotte in any way.

There are some things that Lucinil knows because he's actually done a lot of experimenting, not just reading about it.

Charlotte is fine now. She just needs to come to terms with the fact that she's one with the Devil.

In short.

There are now two devils in the world.

b.

And Charlotte, fused with the spirit of ancestral Balinese.

Charlotte may not have horns, but can she use her demonic control powers?

While he didn't have the same mastery of magic as the Demon, he did have access to the power to use shadows, an ability that the Demon embodied.

I don't have that kind of power, so it must have been a special ability that only the Ancestral Demon Valie possessed.

I like knowing that Charlotte's condition has already improved, and Charlotte seems happy that she thinks that the enchantment can stabilize her condition.

How do I get Charlotte to accept that it's okay for the power to overtake her from time to time?

"......."

Looking out over the terrace, Charlotte's complexion darkened.

I looked over and saw Riana and Cliff running down the trail.

The revolutionary forces fell into the hands of Owen de Getmora, and indeed into the hands of the imperial government.

Charlotte knows that Riana's vengeance is misdirected.

Regardless of her decision to hate the current demon, Riana is just being tricked.

Charlotte didn't explain anything to me.

"By the way, we're about to be seniors."

Charlotte said, forcing a cheerful expression.

Winter break has come to an end, and with it, a lot of things.

We're in the second grade.

Then, the first years will come in.

Honestly, I don't pay attention to freshmen. I've got too many other things on my mind to do like senior year.

"What kind of kids are they?"

However, it was nice to see Charlotte smiling as she wondered what the juniors would be like.

But somehow.

It suddenly occurred to me that the smile looked a bit, well, forced.

\* \* \*

The end of winter break is almost here.

Each man's desire to be strong was fueled by a different fire. Some were driven by revenge, some were driven by helping others, and some were driven by a sense of protecting something.

The close combat majors had it pretty good in that regard.

-Ka-ching!

"Poof!"

"This is a power you are not yet familiar with, Ludwig. If you don't use it in moderation, it will ruin you."

"Yes!"

Saviolin Tana was a resident teacher and was available to teach us at any time.

There are now four sides that can be enchanted.

Me, Ellen, Klippmann, and Ludwig.

Originally, Ludwig was the only one who persisted in harassing her, but they each began to learn swordplay from her.

In Ellen's case, her schedule was juggled with the Miss Temple contest, so she didn't have time to teach, and then she went back to her hometown, and so on and so forth, so she met up with Saviolin Tana, but it was very late in the game when they shared the sword.

Scarlett wasn't here, as we'd only checked on those who could be enchanted.

Of course, cold water has its ups and downs, and Klippmann and Ludwig were still rough and tumble with their enchantments.

Saviolin Tana had originally treated Ludwig appropriately, calling him a sunbae.

But then, out of nowhere, he awakens a magical enhancement. And then there was Klippmann. After realizing that Ludwig and Klippmann's qualities were nothing out of the ordinary, Savior Tana's teaching became quite serious.

You never know when the next big fight is going to happen, so training people is something she feels she has to do, even if she's not a formal teacher at Temple.

"What if you focus on enchantment to the detriment of what you can actually see? Look at the invisible as well as the visible."

"You're being too hard on horsepower. No one has unlimited power. It is not the absolute amount of power that matters. Remember, true destructive power comes from precision and finesse in the use of magic. The same amount of power can crush a boulder, or just hurt your hand, depending on how you use it."

"Enchanted body armor is of a different quality than the barriers used by mages. They shape their shields to be as efficient as possible, which is why they have spells and casting. But with enchanted barriers, the barrier is a pure release of power. Even if you use the same amount of magic, the protection itself is not comparable to a magical shield. Remember. There are situations where you can get hit, and there are situations where you shouldn't, and as a result, investing too much energy into your shields will decrease your endurance."

"Swordsmanship needs to be overhauled from the ground up in the context of using magic enhancements. There are times when you have to allow things that you shouldn't have allowed before, and there are attacks that you shouldn't allow at all. Understand the weight and focus of the enemy's attack. After all, the purpose of swordplay is to take your opponent's life."

"You're inexperienced, we'll have to wait until you've gotten used to the enchantment before proceeding. Ludwig."

"Let's do some more."

"No, sore muscles aren't the problem with overusing enchantments. When I say rest, it's not a suggestion, it's a command. Rest."

"Yeah that....... Yes."

Savior Tana had been watching Ludwig and Cliff in a little more detail than just a few quick words.

Of course, I was limited in what I could teach them because they weren't used to enchantments yet.

"You're getting the hang of this very quickly, Reinhardt."

"Okay, great. Can you do some fine-tuning of the power? Like, double the shields, then cut them in half?" ....... Oh, yeah. That works. Excellent."

"Of course, your skills are still lacking, but your growth is remarkable. You are already at the level of an Adept, especially in the area of enchantment."

"In most situations, someone of your caliber should have no trouble dealing with people who don't know how to use magic enhancements, but there are times when you might get beaten by someone who doesn't know how to use magic enhancements....... Hmmm, of course, that's at the level of a beginner in magic enhancement, so that shouldn't happen to you. Sorry. I said something stupid. Forget it."

"It won't be long before you're a Swordmaster."

Sir?

I can't stand it because it's floating too much.

The attitude was different, but still extremely favoritist.

"......."

Ellen, who was watching, stood still and watched me and Tana do it.

\* \* \*

In the first place, today's tournament is only for those who can enchant.

The venue is a Class B training ground.

Ludwig first, then Klippmann, then me.

The last one was Ellen.

After battling until we were all exhausted, the three of us sat on the wall of the training center, waiting for the final round to begin.

"Hah....... I'm still a long way off."

Ludwig wrapped a towel around his neck and drank water from his canteen to wipe away the sweat.

"......Yes."

Klippmann mumbled something along those lines.

It's clear that I'm not as good as the critically acclaimed me, who has awakened to the power of enchantment, and it's clear that I'm not as good as Ellen over there.

And the devil.

The Devil must be more of a threat than Savior Tana, the absolute in front of us now, Ludwig and Klippmann must be thinking.

"Let's do this."

Ludwig looked at Klippmann and said so nonchalantly, and Klippmann looked a little dumbfounded.

They had little contact with each other. Ludwig is also an unflappable character.

But now they have something in common: a hatred of the devil.

"Uh....... Yeah. Yeah."

Klippmann nodded at Ludwig's words.

Demons unite humanity.

The presence of enemies is an important device to foster cohesion.

I took advantage of it, he took advantage of it, and it was a complicated feeling that I can't quite put into words, watching these arrangements come together, even in such a small relationship.

I look at the confrontation between Ellen and Tana.

Watching the waves of blue mana wash over Ellen's body, Tana concentrated her power.

-pot!

-Ka-ching!

Tana deflects and parries Ellen's flurry of swords.

Stabbing deflects swords, slashing deflects slashes, and paint doesn't even react to it.

Tana hadn't moved a step from her spot and was taking the brunt of Ellen's offense.

And I know because I've crossed swords with Ellen many, many times.

Of course, Ellen doesn't just use her sword. She can use a one-handed sword stance to draw an opponent's sword, and then use her free hand to grab or kick them.

Seeing the trajectory of Tana's sword, which deflected her stab to the right, Ellen reaches out with her left hand to catch Tana's slash.

His right hand is blocked. So he took advantage of the gap where he couldn't react for a second.

But of course, just as Ellen's left hand is empty, Tana's left hand is also empty.

Tana tries to catch Ellen's outstretched left wrist with her left hand.

Ellen pounced on Tana as if she knew even that.

Fake on fake on fake.

I mean, not just jumping in, but literally flinging yourself into Tana's arms, almost like a hug.

-Bam!

"Yuck!"

"!"

"!"

"?"

He punched Tana in the forehead.

-Bam!

I wasn't expecting this, and I saw Xavier Tana, who had fallen backwards on her ass, clutching her forehead, her mouth open in disbelief.

"????"

"What is it?

"What have I gotten myself into?

"No, what are you doing?

"What is this?

"What is this?

Tana's expression was a mixture of emotions.

Ellen won the game with a flurry of punches.

You're right about the upvotes.

What to say.

I was dumbfounded because I didn't think Ellen would do that.

Episode 380.

Tana looks dumbfounded, but she brushes herself off and looks at Ellen.

"You can't take an opponent's life with a smite, assuming you're using enchantments on each other. Moo, sure, it was a little embarrassing......."

Tana was caught off guard by it in the first place, partly because she didn't think Ellen would use it in the first place, and partly because she knew it wouldn't be a useful move in the real world.

If Tana had been using her power enhancement correctly, Ellen's blow would have been one of the worst things she could have done, playing into the hands of someone more skilled than her.

Embarrassed by Ellen's sudden use of such a low blow, Tana stammered.

What to say.

But he's a warrior brother and he's really good at it, so why wouldn't he?" etc.

It was a kind of vigilance that comes with trust.

"I don't think I can compete with ...... if I don't do this."

At that, Tana fell silent for a moment.

I felt like if I didn't do something like this, I was going to lose a hundred percent, so this is what I came up with.

In fact, I've done it anyway.

'uh.......'

"Is that right......?

He nods in agreement.

"It's good to poke at the votes. But don't rely on these numbers too much. But....... That number was great. Because I did get hit."

Of course, she eventually acknowledged Ellen's base, seemingly impressed that she had managed to pull a fast one on her, albeit an unexpected one.

It was an adult response.

"I'm sorry."

Ellen inclined her head toward Savior Tana, who thought it was rude.

I didn't think I'd be able to come up with an answer that wasn't a slap in the face.

What to say.

I can't believe she's doing such a cute thing.

Of course, if you weren't Tana, you would have broken your nose the moment you took that punch.

"There's no need to apologize. It's a skill to find those numbers to deal with opponents you can't deal with head-to-head."

"It's ......."

It's well-meaning but ultimately gets on Ellen's nerves. Of course, she doesn't even realize that she's ignoring Saviolin Tana.

She doesn't need to talk to anyone in her class at her level in the first place.

"Let's try again."

As if that kind of surprise wouldn't work this time, Saviolin Tana pointed her dueling blades at Ellen.

"Yes."

As if to say that she wasn't going to use the shallow end from now on, Ellen also started a confrontation with Xavier Tana.

Naturally.

It was all Ellen.

Of course, there is grace in defeat.

She's never been one to play with it at all, like the three of us.

\* \* \*

Unlike the first time she was punished with a slap, Tana didn't do it twice, and Ellen didn't try it twice.

So the result of the five practice matches was a total loss.

Of course, it was a fierce battle. Tana wasn't playing at full strength to gauge Ellen's capabilities, but that didn't make it any easier for her.

After five such practice matches, Tana looked at us.

"You two go back, except for Ellen and Reinhardt."

Klippmann and Ludwig were a bit dumbfounded by this, but Tana's mood was not a joke, so Ludwig and Klippmann left the theater.

It sent them back, except for me.

I could see what Tana was trying to do.

"Now take 'it' out."

"......."

"I need to see what you're really made of."

Saviolin Tana is seeing Ellen Artorius' skills for the first time today.

Ellen didn't compete in the tournament, and she's not a certified swordsmanship teacher.

A practice match is a practice match after all. Just as Tana can't take it seriously, Ellen doesn't fight through gritted teeth.

She was currently the strongest prosecutor in the Empire, and seemed to be trying to determine Ellen's exact capabilities.

Ellen wordlessly summoned a ramen in her right hand.

Ellen has one more holy object. But she only told me about it for now, and she hasn't taken it out yet.

Tana's dueling sword is enchanted with blue energy.

A worn out water lance would break or cut off just by bumping into lement.

Swordmaster's Proof. Auror Blade.

Ellen stared at the magic coursing through Tana's sword.

She is beyond even the Swordmaster. Savior Tana stares at Ellen with a serious expression on her face, as if this is no longer a joke.

"Do it with the intention of killing me."

It's very similar to what happened with Klippmann not too long ago, but it's a very different situation.

It's okay to kill it.

You'll never be able to kill me.

That's what I meant.

"Yes."

Ellen looks at Tana on the viola and takes a deep breath.

She won't even think about it. She knows that no matter how sincere you are, you're no match for her.

Enchanted, Ellen is crushed by Savior Tana, who is carrying a bowl of ramen.

-Bam!

The collision of auror blades and laments sent an ear-splitting ripple through the haze.

It's not just about the gong sound.

"!"

The impact of the Auror's blade was enough to send both hands holding Ellen's ramen almost soaring into the air.

My chest opened.

Tana seized the opportunity.

-Bam!

"Evil......!"

Ellen gasped, her left fist still in the air.

"Eek....... Yuck......!"

Tana watches as Ellen gasps for air, clutching her chest as her enchantments are removed.

"The Auror Blade is more than just a sharp sword. With waves of energy at their disposal, they can deliver a powerful counter-balance to their opponents just by striking them."

"Hmph....... Hehe......."

"I was going to make you lose the sword, but you're holding on to it, so I'll give you credit for that."

It's a no-brainer, but this is what Ellen looks like in one hit.

I was shocked to see it too.

"Hmph....... Hehe......."

Tana looks down at Ellen with a cold stare.

"You are strong, and you will be stronger."

"......."

"Just as the fundamentals of swordsmanship must change the moment you use an enchantment, the fundamentals of swordsmanship must change again the moment you use an Auror blade. So, if your opponent is a Swordmaster, you must not treat them the way you have been treating them."

"......."

"I'll teach you how to deal with Swordmasters when they're not Swordmasters, how to deal with Archmages. How to deal with monsters, demons, fiends, and armies."

So far, Ludwig, myself, and Klippmann have been talking at eye level. I've taught us what we need to do now.

But.

Ellen is suddenly taught how to deal with the Swordmaster.

If Tana comes out of nowhere, it's because she sees a possibility in her practice match with Ellen.

"Wake up, Ellen Artorius."

"......."

Ellen kept her gaze fixed on the floor of the rehearsal hall and caught her breath.

"You are not free to be weak."

It has to be strong.

To protect what's important to you.

Like if you're going to take on something, you should be able to handle this level of harshness.

Ellen slowly rises to her feet. Ellen Artorius's eyes are not dead.

The mightiest knight in the empire is trying to tell you something from the bottom of his heart.

I could see in his eyes that he was determined to learn.

Saviolin Tana looks at Ellen impassively.

"If only it were me, not these young ones.

"That would be great.

'Why, the gods have chosen you to be the Devil's arch-enemy.......'

'Why do you guys have to get hurt.......'

'Is there still no role for me.......'

Tana read the emotions on her face.

"Here we go."

"It's ......."

In woe.

She seemed to foresee some sad fate in the two of us.

\* \* \*

Tana seemed impatient. As if she felt that if she didn't get stronger quickly, while she still had time, she might be killed for nothing when she really needed it.

In the original movie, Tana took on Ludwig and Ellen, the holders of the Holy Grail, after the Gate had already been blown up. Even then, Tana was rough with Ludwig, but less so with Ellen. Even then, Ellen was already somewhat complete, and Ludwig still had a lot to work on.

But for now, there's a sense of urgency, but there's still time.

That's why Tana is focusing on Ellen, who has more potential for growth. Plus, she doesn't have an owner for Alsbringer yet.

Ludwig and Klippmann told me what I needed to fix at this stage.

But she said she would teach Ellen how to fight.

How to fight swordmasters, archmages, demons, fiends, and armies.

We want to teach you how to kill something.

"Reinhard, you come over here too."

And I have the holy relics.

As if I'm an exception to the rule, Savior Tana stops me and Ellen in our tracks.

"What is a master class?"

"Someone who can use an Auror blade."

"So what is this auror thing?"

"I thought you were referring to the ability to enchant beyond the physical body."

"Yeah."

She nodded, as if it were a commonplace answer and not necessarily wrong.

"So let's say your main weapons are your fists and feet, you can channel magic into your feet and fists, is that a master class?"

When your primary weapon becomes enchanted, hit it with Master Class.

So, if you're in melee for the long haul, is it already a master class the moment you enchant, because you've learned how to enchant your main weapon?

"......I don't think so."

Of course not.

"I suppose so. It's usually called a master class when you can enchant things other than your own body, but that's just the output, not the actual thing."

Saviolin Tana has lowered her training sword, her hair coated in blue mana. Ellen and Tana are both energized by each other.

While both are enchanting their bare bodies, Ellen and Tana look a little different.

Ellen has gone from using very explosive powers to more refined powers, but Tana's powers feel extremely controlled.

If Ellen's body felt blue, Tana's body felt like a blur.

Extremely refined enchantments.

If anything, it felt like they optimized the enchantment itself by minimizing unnecessary consumption because it was a faint light.

"A master class is when a disenchantment is taken to the extreme. Come closer. Maintain your enchantment."

At Tana's direction, Ellen stepped in front of her.

It was a little embarrassing to have Tana show up as if she was going to show me something amazing.

With the middle and index finger of your right hand together, point it at Ellen's forehead.

It's the common chestnut.

"????"

Ellen's face lit up with questions.

No, a grandmaster's hard chestnut.

Are you going to kill Ellen?

-Earth!

Tana's swat landed with a thud on Ellen's forehead, but she didn't seem to be in any pain. Her head was only slightly knocked back.

By the way.

It's kind of weird to hear a beetle make that noise.......

"It must feel like metal on metal, right?"

"Yes."

Ellen nods.

"This is the magic enhancement you do. The formation of powerful shields, and the enhancement of physical abilities."

At our level, we're not quite there yet.

"Okay, now try this one."

Tana once again prepares the chestnuts.

This time it's different.

Ellen looks at Tana's scabbard against her forehead.

"......."

No.

I don't think I've ever seen him scared before.

Watch her eyes flutter as she pretends not to!

Ellen is freaking out!

It's weird that I'm more afraid of a bee sting than a fist bump.

That would scare me too!

"......."

Ellen's shoulders began to shake slightly, and Tana turned her gaze to me in disapproval.

"Me....... Me?"

I might actually die.

I'm sick of the whiteness of my complexion, too.

Let's do that.

"Let's just say I'm right."

Suddenly, Ellen stopped trembling and said, "I'm sorry. Her eyes narrowed in determination.

No.

Ya.

What does this make me?

"No sir, I'll just beat myself to death."

If you become the right picture instead of me, I'm bound to end up like this!

I'm not sure I'm not going to die, but let's just say it. Tana looked back and forth between me and Ellen, then dropped her finger.

"......On second thought, I don't think I need to hit him, and I'm not going to hit him hard enough to kill him."

Tana sighed in embarrassment and dropped her hand.

Both Ellen and I breathed an involuntary sigh of relief at the sight of those murderous fingers.

"It's just, you know, something like that."

She flicks a crackling chestnut into the air.

-Bam!

A fierce sound rang out from Tana's fingers, more like the explosion of gunpowder than the snap of a finger.

What did I just hear?

"That's the difference between a master class and a disenchantment."

"......."

Now, you were going to grind that into my forehead.

Ellen looks at Tana with that kind of stare.

"Well, hmmm. Oh, well, you didn't do it anyway....... Hmm."

She avoided Ellen's gaze, embarrassed.

"How did you do that?"

"It's an aggressive use of disenchantment."

"Offensive operations......?"

"Yes, you and Reinhardt are skilled at enhancing your powers, but you've only gotten as far as strengthening your bodies internally and gaining protection externally through the release of your powers. This is the next level."

The mana in her right hand seemed to refine, then suddenly exploded in her right hand alone, burning as if it were about to explode.

"At some point, you're probably going to get to the point where you can just release a burst of magic throughout your body. And then it gets more and more granular. From full body to just the right foot, to just the right arm, to just the right arm down to the habak, to just the hand, and then just the fingers."

Tana held up her index finger, and a spark of magic flickered like a blue flame only on her index finger.

The ability to detonate enchantments at a level that only adds armor is now possible.

Start with the whole body and work your way down.

The more you focus your magic, rather than radiate it, the more destructive it will be.

From Tana's fingers, which seem to be engulfed in blue flames, the flames begin to concentrate into a single point.

"Slowly, you get used to focusing your disenchantment in smaller and smaller increments across your entire body, to one extreme point."

"In detail."

"Focus."

As Tana says this, the lights on her fingers begin to glow, gathering at her fingertips.

"Eventually, we'll be able to have enchantments at our fingertips."

"Self. and beyond this stage."

She gripped her lowered training sword.

The cultivation sword in her hand gradually became engulfed in blue flames, as if ignited by the sparks of magic gathering at the tip of her index finger.

"This is what happens when you reach the extremes of horsepower operations."

The ability to enchant, refined to the point of being able to enchant things beyond the boundaries of your body.

"That's the condition of the master class."

Once you can do that, you've reached the master class.

Episode 381.

Conditions in the master class.

When you've reached the point of extreme enchantment activism where you can enchant things you hold, you're a master.

If so, we're back to the original question.

After all, it does qualify to have enchantments on the armor.

As if to acknowledge my and Ellen's questions, Tana clenched her fists.

"Masters who have trained professionally in close combat are few and far between, but they do exist, and the ones who are worthy of a master class are the ones who can do this."

She stretches her enchanted palm into the air.

-Kurung!

The brief flash of blue magic in her palm assured me that I would be shattered to pieces if I were hit.

"It's the same extreme of magic manipulation, in that it's not just using the magic in the body as a shield, but in short bursts and bursts. Of course, they take it a step further by injecting the magic itself. That's where the paths diverge."

He explained that a master class in melee combat was, after all, only for those who were well beyond the stage of using magic as a shield.

A fighter and a swordmaster have different training regimens.

It's one thing to train to be able to enchant a weapon you're holding, but it's quite another to push the enchantment envelope with martial arts.

Ellen shook her head.

"So you're trained in both, then?"

At the same time that Tana was using her Auror blade, she had just demonstrated a technique that masters of martial arts demonstrate.

Tana's face flushed slightly at the mention of having trained on two completely different paths.

"Well....... Well, that's not true....... I've only trained with swords. I'm familiar with spears, bows, and other weapons, of course, but my training in martial arts is relatively shallow."

"So how did you just do that?"

"......."

She blushed and her lips trembled slightly.

"When you reach a certain extreme, the understanding of other disciplines follows to some extent......."

I'm such a grandmaster that I can do things I know nothing about.

I'm stumbling over my words.

Tana said she wasn't used to teaching anyone, so even though she was a preceptor at the Temple, teaching would be very foreign to her.

"That's great."

"......."

It was quite a sight to behold as the viola player, Tana, blushed to the point of bursting at Ellen's frank admiration.

"It's funny to hear the words I used to hear from my teachers at Temple and then come back to Temple and hear them again from your mouths as students......."

She finally sighed heavily with a bitter smile.

"What I'm trying to say is that now that you've gotten used to using your enchantments in terms of enhanced defense, you need to take it to the next level. And whether you're a martial artist or an armorer, it's common to train to improve the autonomy of your enchantments."

Up until now, you've only used magic enhancements to strengthen your body and increase your physical strength. But now you need to know how to use magic itself offensively.

You'll also need to know how to turn your magical armor, which used to protect your body, into a spear.

And if you take it to the extreme, you get to the point where you're disenchanting an armory, and when you get to that point, it's naturally labeled a master class.

"But even if a Swordmaster-level foe were to appear in your midst, you would not be able to deal with it. Few realize the power of enchantment, and even fewer reach the master class there, so that moment will not come to you anytime soon."

We may be special, but we don't become Swordmasters in a few days.

That's why Tana told Ellen in the first place.

I'm not going to teach you how to be a Swordmaster, I'm going to teach you how to deal with Swordmasters.

"A Swordmaster is no match for a normal human, let alone one who has learned a fair amount of martial arts, or even one who has access to magical enhancements. The same goes for mages. Most offensive spells will be blocked by magical shields, and the ones that might work will either be close enough to kill the opposing mage before the casting time is up, or they will flee out of reach."

No matter how many unusual qualities we possess, we are no match for the Swordmaster.

"So there's only one best way to do it."

She holds still.

"Ambush."

He told me something that any assassin should know.

"No matter how many master classes you take, you can't stay enchanted all the time, and there's always a moment when you're defenseless. You can't always be sensitive to what's going on around you."

Ambush.

It's cheesy, but there's nothing else we can do. Some of the things he said were so realistic that I panicked.

"Keep in mind that of the many master classes that have existed in history, more have died by assassination than have died honorably in battle."

Saviolin Tana's advice was more important than I realized.

More often than not, kills were made in traps, ambushes, or while they were asleep, rather than in hand-to-hand combat or on the battlefield.

"What if we have to go head-to-head?"

At Ellen's words, Tana gets serious.

"Run away, assuming that's even possible."

She wasn't playing around.

"What if I can't get away?"

It's a tough conversation, but a necessary one.

If you can't run away, you're in for a fight.

"If you can't run, surrender. You are more likely to survive if you are at the mercy of the enemy than if you fight back."

For us to fight the Swordmaster would be as bad as surrendering." Her expression was serious, and she wasn't mocking us at all.

Seriously, I was talking about what we should do when a master class appeared in front of our eyes that was trying to kill us.

If you can't take them by surprise, don't fight them head-on.

If you can't even run away, you might as well surrender.

"What if the other person is someone who has no chance of saving my life?"

This time it was my question.

In the first place, she's telling us this to tell us not to fight the master class.

Ambush, flee, surrender.

When all options are gone and there is no other way but to go head-to-head. What do we do.

"I will teach it to you now. But don't be arrogant enough to think that learning it will enable you to beat the master class."

Tana couldn't have been more serious.

"You can't kill an elephant with a toothpick."

It was a no-brainer.

"Keep in mind that I'm teaching you this because I want you to poke an elephant in the eye with a toothpick and walk away. Of course, even that won't be easy."

What if.

She wants us to survive for a long time.

We don't know when the fight will come, we don't know who will target us and when and where.

That's why it teaches us how to deal with a force that's too much for us to handle, or a situation that's too much for us to handle.

Swordmaster.

Archmage.

Demons.

Demons.

Monsters.

And an army.

It's not about winning.

How to deal with it.

She was trying to teach us how to survive a situation that we never know when we might encounter.

\* \* \*

How we would survive an encounter with the Swordmaster if we had to go toe-to-toe.

The odds were so close to zero that Tana said we might as well surrender.

"Use obstacles. A Swordmaster's senses transcend those of a mere mortal, but our best sense of perception is sight. Whether it's scattering sand or throwing large objects, try to block your opponent's view."

Somehow.

The sordid tales began to emerge.

"Use noise. After the eyes, the second sense is hearing. It's also the sense that's activated the most when your vision is blocked. Alternatively, you can try to avoid noisy areas."

Sprinkle some dirt and make a fuss.

It's too real to be grandmaster's advice, and I imagine myself actually doing it, so it's something.......

That makes me sad.

"Assuming it's an enclosed space, it's best to start a fire if you can. Fire provides noise while also blocking visibility due to smoke. Also, breathing is fair game. You can hold your breath for a long time, but not forever, and while the heat may not be a threat to the Swordmaster, breathing in the smoke is dangerous to him."

It teaches you how to run away, not how to deal with it.

I know you're right, but.......

I'm being treated like an expectant member of the human race, being taught to throw dirt, make noise, and start fires.

"......."

"......."

Neither Ellen nor I could figure out what was what.

Tana punched Ellen when she had an opening, but in real life, Ellen would have been dead in that moment.

"Don't try to cross swords."

"Don't even try to spill it."

"Avoid all fire."

It should be avoided.

Easier said than done, but is it possible.

"And don't even try to attack. You won't be able to handle the power of the sword, and the moment your weapon touches the enemy's body, the same thing will happen to you as it did to the sword."

Don't even try to attack. If you think you've stabbed your opponent in the nape of the neck, the reactionary force will twist your wrist or bounce it backwards.

In the end, I was told to focus on running away and not try to fight it.

"Under normal circumstances, yes."

Tana looks at the two of us as if she's going to tell a different story from now on.

"I sent Klippmann and Ludwig back because there's no point in them hearing this story. Of course, it was also to hide the fact that you are the holders of the holy relic."

What we both have in common.

You possess a holy object in the form of a sword.

"As you can imagine, just bumping into an auror blade was enough to send the ramen flying."

"Yes."

"A normal sword would have shattered upon contact with the blade, not the Auror Blade. The Auror Blade is a powerful weapon in its own right, an enchantment that no other magic can match. Unless a sword is made of a very hard substance or has powerful magical protection, it is safe to say that no sword can withstand a head-to-head encounter with an Auror Blade."

"......I see."

It's not just about being sharp. Depending on the skill of the Auror Blade wielder, the blade can be used to deliver a powerful counter-impact, such as by exploding the magic within the blade upon impact.

A normal sword is not cut by the blade, it is shattered just by hitting the sword face.

She looks back and forth between me and Ellen.

"Rament and Tiamata are holy objects. They won't break or lose a tooth against an Auror Blade, and if you miss, you can always summon them because they're soul-bound. So even if you're facing an unreasonable ability like Auror Blade, you've got the basics covered. The minimum baseline of not losing your weapon."

Unless you have a very powerful magical weapon or artifact, you won't even be able to compete in a master class.

"But you can only take it so far. The moment you try to meet the sword head-on, the reaction force will create a gap, and that's it."

After saying that to Ellen, Tana looked at me this time.

"Reinhard, your situation may be different."

"Different?"

"Assuming you can use Tiamata's holy power. If you can enchant your sword with divine power, it will protect Tiamata and you considerably from the anti-elasticity of the Auror blade."

A sword and myself, not painted with magic, but enhanced with holy power. Does this mean that the immense destructive power of the Auror Blade will be less impactful?

I've never faced an Auror Blade, but I think I know what Tana is talking about.

In practice.

While imbued with divine power, he was able to take a few blows from the monstrous attacks of Leviathan Ranze, who had similarly enhanced his sword with divine power.

Leviathan was not a Swordmaster, but I didn't think he was inferior to a Swordmaster.

After all, even a universal Swordmaster wouldn't be a monster that could survive being stabbed through the heart.

I was able to deal with him because of external conditions, but also because the divine power of Tiamata herself was very helpful.

Dealing with Auror Blades.

I can to some extent.

"Assuming you have access to divine power, you can take the Auror Blade. And Ellen."

"Yes."

"Ramen should be able to penetrate the Swordmaster's magical defense. Of course, a stab would be more likely."

A sword with auror blade-level sharpness that runs like a passive.

Since Ellen can't control it herself, she can't use it as freely as Tana the Xavier's Auror Blade.

But its sharpness and cutting power is overwhelming.

"If you guys are together in that situation, you have a better chance of surviving."

Tiamata can withstand but not kill, and Ramen cannot withstand but can kill.

While I hold on, Ellen pokes.

You can't fight a master class unless you're in it together.

"If the two of you are not together, Reinhardt, you will hold off the attack as long as you can, obscure the enemy's view, stabilize the situation, and then flee."

"Ellen, the same goes for you. If they're watching you, they're not going to give you a break. Any fumbling attempts at stabbing will get you killed. So watch your enemy's sword and dodge it, inflicting only a slight wound rather than a fatal blow, and letting him know that your sword is a threat. He will panic, and that will give you time to escape."

In the end, Tana concluded, don't even think about taking on the Swordmaster unless you're in it together.

Episode 382.

Tana's training sessions were very long. It lasted until after dark.

I even had a scenario where Ellen was one-on-one with me, me one-on-one with Ellen, and the two of us sieging Tana.

Ellen faced her with ramen and I with tiamata.

Of course she was no match. Even if Tana had been a Swordmaster, she would have been no match for her, but she was beyond even that. Even if Rament's attacks did manage to reach her, they would only bounce off her body with half a second's momentum.

I don't know how long it took for that to happen.

"That's it for today. Go back and get some rest. I'll see you here tomorrow at the same time."

Tana seemed determined to keep watching our training unless she had a special assignment.

Both Ellen and I were so exhausted that we had to go to the on-call chaplain's office to recover.

The sun was long gone and it was past my standard bedtime.

It was training for a fight with someone much stronger than us. Ellen looked serious.

I wonder if he thinks he's going to be fighting more demons than he can handle.

"I'm hungry."

"......."

Damn, all you wanted to do was eat it. Ellen glares at me as she says this.

"Yeah, let's get something to eat."

I usually work out a lot, but today I did more damage than good. Let's get something to eat and rest.

I'm sure it'll blow up again tomorrow.

\* \* \*

Ellen and I grilled four large beef sirloins. Not exactly an ambitious nighttime meal, but then again, nothing we make at night is really a nighttime meal in the first place.

-Omnibus

He usually eats a lot, but when he says he's hungry, he really eats a lot.

He eats a lot, but not voraciously. They continue to eat at the same pace as they started, with their tiny mouths constantly wiping.

I've been living like this for a while now.

Talking to Ellen all day and then making something to eat at night.

I've been skipping a few days lately, but in the end, this is what happened most often in the temple.

Eating a big meal before going to bed with Ellen.

"You know, I've been thinking, maybe your and my real talent is this whole eating and sleeping straight through the night thing and not getting reflux esophagitis thing?"

Isn't it a talent that I don't have any stomach problems with what I eat before bed on fictional days?

Apparently he and I are the best in the world at camouflage.

"......?"

Judging by the blank look on his face when he didn't understand what I was talking about, I'm guessing he'll never have a problem with his internal organs.

In the end, I ate one steak and Ellen ate three.

"Do you want more?"

"No, thank you."

Ellen shook her head, as if that was enough. I can't believe I'm going to have to watch her refuse to eat.

No, I didn't. You've had three.

"Then let's take a break. I feel like I'm in some kind of psychological pain that won't go away even when I'm healed."

It was Ellen who took the brunt of the beating, but so did I.

Still, Ellen makes dramatic movements to try to make the angle of the hit as painless as possible, and I can't do that.

I understand the sense of urgency and the path that my mood is showing me, but I can't react to it.

The pain was manageable, but I was literally mentally exhausted and all I wanted to do was rest.

"You know me."

I start to get up, but Ellen stops me.

"What?"

"Come to think of it, master class, I think I can handle it."

I couldn't help but blink at the sound of that.

"Suddenly?"

"Yeah, follow me."

Ellen rose from her seat and led me to the stage.

\* \* \*

I realized what else Ellen was trying to show me.

Ellen's cloak draped over her shoulders as she brought me to the rehearsal hall in her Class A dorm.

This is the lapelt, the sun god's cloak, that we showed you last time.

Ellen hadn't told Tana about the Sun God's cloak. As long as we're the owners of the artifact, Tana said, we might not be able to deal with a Master, but we might be able to avoid or escape it somehow.

Ellen seemed to think that if she combined that with the rappel, she could take on the masters.

Come to think of it.

I don't know what the sun god's cloak does in the first place.

"What is that thing?"

A holy relic in the form of a cloak.

"Throw one at me."

"What, you want me to throw it?"

"Yeah. Anything."

There's nothing here to throw, so I grabbed a water lily sword because it was all over the place.

"You want me to throw this?"

"Yes."

I don't think she's going to get hurt. She's only wearing a cloak. Thinking nothing of it, I threw the water lily at her.

And.

-Quack!

Just before the blade touched Ellen's body, there was an explosion of flame in the air, and she saw the blade shatter into pieces.

"......What is it?"

What did I just see?

Just before it touched down, a barrier of flames intercepted it out of thin air, as if it were an auto-attack.

"Lapelts have the power to protect."

I had a feeling it was a defense-related holy grail.

But that's not protection. The moment an attack hits, it's not only blocking it, it's also applying a recoil force that causes the sparks to explode.

It's a defense, but it's also an offense.

Apparently, Ellen and I had a couple of successful attacks on Tana as we collaborated.

Saviolin Tana's sword was loaded with anti-elasticity, but her body itself was loaded with anti-elasticity as well, so a successful attack would often be met with a tremendous jolt that would snap her wrist backwards.

"No, wait a minute....... Then that's......."

Ellen nods at my dazed mumbling.

"Yeah, it's not much different than what you're using."

Whenever you are attacked, you return a powerful countermovement. Whether it's a wave of magic or a blast of flame, it's the same: you're hitting back at the attacker.

Ellen's laments already function similarly to auror blades in their own right.

Ellen's lapel, in and of itself, functions like the Auror armor already used in the Master Classes.

Moon Sword.

Cloak of the Sun.

"You....... so you're effectively a Swordmaster, right?"

"I wouldn't call it that, but I think it's close."

Ellen was not much different from the Swordmaster in that she had two holy items.

Temptation.

That's pretty scary.......

Of course, even if Ellen isn't the owner, anyone who gets their hands on these two holy objects will be able to do two things that Swordmasters can do at the same time. Of course, who holds them is also very important.

It would be difficult for someone of Ellen's caliber to use those two holy items properly. I don't know what it would be like to fight a real Swordmaster, but at this point, Ellen might actually be able to hold her own against a Master.

I've gotten to the point where I can see him fighting masters, even if he's aided by a bullshit artifact called the Holy Grail.

And Ellen hasn't even unleashed the true power of the holy objects yet.

The true power of Tiamata is the explosive release of powerful holy power. In my case, it allows me to use divine powers that I shouldn't be able to.

Alsbringer's true power is to summon the war god Als.

We don't know the true power of laments and lapels in any way.

But even in this state, the two holy relics were immensely powerful.

Auror Blades and Auror Armor.

What happens if Ellen, who already has both, truly reaches Master Class and is able to wield both powers? There may be no one in the world who can match her, as the powers of the artifacts will be amplified as well.

I thought, Am I going to have to watch that Ellen become my enemy one day?

In front of my frozen face, Ellen suddenly removed her cloak.

"......what are you doing?"

Ellen walked over to me and held out her cloak.

"I'll give it to you."

"...... this?"

"Yes."

It was so nonchalant that for a moment I didn't understand what Ellen was doing.

This.

Why.

To me.

"He'll need you more than I will."

Ellen is still smiling.

You are willing to give up one of the two things that make you a Swordmaster.

You said I'd need more.

I guess that means you're giving it to me because I'm weaker.

Yes.

In fact, I need it more. A lot of people are going to turn against me, and I need a shield, not a weapon, to defend myself against them.

The Sun God's cloak would certainly serve as such a shield.

should be received.

As Ellen says, this is something I really need. I don't know about her, but I'm sure this will save me from a lot of crises.

Ellen is smiling.

He seemed genuinely happy to be able to give me something.

It doesn't explain anything, it doesn't tell me anything.

It always gives to me. It rejoices in giving.

I should have gotten it.

I may be out of shape for a while, but I know it's for the best.

"No."

"......?"

"How am I supposed to get this?"

I pushed the cloak she held out toward Ellen.

"Your parents gave it to me because they care about you."

I can't accept that. I replied. Ellen must have had a lot on her mind. Giving me something her parents had given her would be disrespectful to their concerns.

He offered to give it to me, but I declined because he wanted to make sure I was okay.

"......."

Ellen lowered her eyes, realizing that my answer would not have been easy, and recalled the rapport.

"Still, thanks."

I hugged Ellen, whose grass had died a bit. Ellen looked confused for a moment, then pulled me into a face-to-face hug.

It was something I needed, but I didn't take it.

I couldn't have asked for more.

"I mean it."

My voice shook violently even as I thought. I hope he realizes I didn't take this.

Does this guy realize what I'm giving up?

"Me too, thanks."

Ellen whispers softly, pulling me closer to her, as if she knows.

[Special Achievement - History's Turning Point 'Ellen Artorius']]

[The future has changed dramatically].

[Earned 1,000 achievement points].

What is.

The future has changed?

You just said that not getting a lapel pin changed your future in some way.

I hug Ellen a little harder. I stroke Ellen's hair gently as she shivers slightly in my arms.

I couldn't figure out what had changed.

However, two assumptions can be made

Or that I'm going to die because I didn't take the lapel.

Or.

I didn't get a lapel.

Rather, you've survived something that should have killed you.

"Hey."

I call Ellen to stillness.

"......Yes."

"You know I like you a lot, right?"

Ellen's body jerks violently. She buries her face in my arms.

"Yes."

Ellen adds in a shaky voice.

"Me too, me too....... a lot."

We hugged for a long, long time.

Episode 383.

Ellen handed me the rappel, and I didn't take it.

That alone changed the future.

I don't know how it's going to come at me.

With the winter break just around the corner, the four of us with magical powers were trained by Saviolin Tana.

And after Ludwig and Klippmann's training, Tana would focus on me and Ellen.

With most of the things I need to worry about out of my hands, and with my primary goal being to get stronger anyway, being taught by Saviolin Tana could only be a good thing for me.

Even as I was working through Tana's more intense than usual training regimen, things were happening.

Two of the most important ones.

"Done?"

"Yeah. The enhancement drug is going into the clinical phase, so I'm going to have the university lab do it, and the same goes for the mana artifact."

The Moonshine and Power Cartridge are complete.

\* \* \*

I headed to the Ministry of Magic with Harriet.

The Magical Research Society, created in the second semester, succeeded in finishing two objects before the end of winter break.

But to make sure those two artifacts really work, I now have to hire a university lab to test them for safety, because that's not something you can do in a high school club.

It was originally created in the chaos that followed the Gate debacle.

In the midst of a war, we needed to use anything that would help us fight, so Moonshine and Power Cartridges went straight to work.

But these are peaceful times, even if the devil is at large, and as revolutionary as the body enhancement pills and power cartridges are, they won't be licensed until they've been proven to work.

Of course, with things like moonshine, you don't know if it's going to work right away, but with things like power cartridges, it's pretty easy.

An artifact that looks like an unusually designed necklace, in the form of a cuboidal blue magic stone the size of a sword, encased in a metallic cage.

That was the power cartridge.

"We're going to call it a power cartridge."

"That's fine."

The artifact is also named by Adelia, just like the original.

Adelia stares at the finished power cartridge.

He had a look of wonder on his face, as if he didn't understand what he had created.

"It's already been proven stable enough, but it's disposable. I suppose we could make it reusable by charging it with mana....... But that would make it bigger, and it might destabilize the mana stabilizer."

Power cartridges are literally like disposable fuel canisters. Once you've used all the horsepower inside, they're empty.

The original was disposable, but you can make it reusable?

But it also seems like something is wrong.

"Are you saying that this thing around ...... is a mana stabilizer?"

"Yes."

Adelia nodded at my words.

The mechanics of the power cartridge are beyond my comprehension, but the structure itself is simple.

A stabilizer that prevents the explosion of magic stones and their enchantments.

"This external stabilizer functions to counteract the instability of using the mana in the magic stone like mana in your body. Naturally, the stabilizer will become less and less durable as you use magic, so while you could build a device with rechargeable magic stones for multiple uses, it will explode if you use it for that long. The mana in the cartridge will inevitably be used in combat, so a magic replenishment device that is likely to explode in combat....... wouldn't make sense."

You could make it rechargeable, but the problem is that the longer you use it, the more likely it is to explode.

Of course, we don't expect it to be reused.

This in itself is already a world-shattering invention.

"You've done well. Now you'll go down in history as a great man."

"Uh, huh......? Is that, is that......?"

I said that to Adelia and looked at Harriet.

Power Cartridge and Moonshine.

I remember Harriet telling me that if something like that was built, the person who built it would go down in history as a great man, and that I shouldn't talk nonsense.

Well, it was eventually created.

Even Adelia, the creator, didn't seem to understand how she could have made it, but she did.

"No, if anyone saw it, they'd think you made it, really?"

Herriot muttered in disbelief at my determined gaze.

"Give me a topic, get me some money. You can't say I don't contribute, can you?"

I wasn't involved in the research at all, but my influence on the research environment was overwhelming. Of course, it's kind of funny how I used to say that I wasn't going to take credit for it, and then it happened.

"Well, since you put it that way, yes, but......."

Herriot eventually ran out of things to say and shut up.

The power cartridge is complete.

It even has reusability, something the original didn't have. I even had a research paper ready for Temple University, so Adelia could really go down in history as the wizard who changed history in high school.

Adelia and Christina may go down in history as better wizards than Heriot.

Of course, Adelia isn't the only one with her hand in it, so it seems likely that all of the members of the study group will eventually become stars of the wizarding world.

By the way.

That's really.......

Is this a good thing?

As I learned things I didn't know when I started the Magic Society, I realized there were other problems.

Moments later, I saw him demonstrating the magic of the power cartridge.

The demonstrator was Redina.

In the magic practice room, with a power cartridge strapped to her neck, Redina summoned a total of eighteen fireballs and fired them down.

-Quack, quack, quack!

Redina, who couldn't even cast any of the big spells with her meager horsepower, was shooting a ton of fireballs in a matter of seconds with her no-cast.

I thought you'd be excited.

-I am a god! God of magic! Come on, come on, come on!

It was a little dizzying to look beyond the dragon and see a kid claiming to be a god.

By the way.

Let's say that kid is carrying a hundred power cartridges.

He's a god, isn't he? He could single-handedly end the world. Of course, he wouldn't be able to strap on a hundred power cartridges.

A million fireballs.

That's a crazy talent bug that you can summon as soon as you think about it.

Without the disadvantage of having very little horsepower, Redina might just be the most dangerous mage in the world.

"You look good, senior."

Harriet laughed, covering her mouth, as she watched Redina jump up and down in excitement, sending fireballs into the pile.

-I'm God! Come on out! Come on out! Come on out!

-Bang, bang, bang, bang!

"Redina, isn't she so cute?"

Oops.

Just you.

It was just a spell to show that the cartridge wouldn't explode until all the mana was spent.

Redina fired off spells like a mad child for a while, and when no more fireballs were summoned, she walked out of the lab, unscrewing the glowing cartridge.

"@Huck....... 헉....... 지, 지친다......."

"Gee, I'm getting tired of yelling at you like that."

"Well, that's because......."

It's not the mana, it's the running around that's exhausting. Redina slumped into a chair, exhausted.

Adelia was the lead on the power cartridge study, but Redina was also a co-lead.

So she had a lot to do with the development of the power cartridge.

"So, junior, are you going to start working on my own cartridge now? I'm ready whenever you are."

"Soon we'll be able to make permanently usable cartridges."

Redina was thrilled to hear that she would soon be working on her own cartridge.

We had an impossible challenge, and we accomplished it.

So everyone's face was all smiles.

\* \* \*

After checking the power cartridge, I checked the moonshine.

"If my theory isn't wrong, it will have the expected effect, and of course there will be no side effects, but we can't commercialize it right away because we have to do clinical trials... although it might be commercialized."

Christina said, looking at the pink reagent in the triangular flask.

Herriot says, looking at the triangular flask.

"They're calling it Moonshine."

Like the original, this one is named Moonshine.

A potion that increases your sensitivity to enchantments and increases the amount of enchantments you make. If Power Cartridges are for mages, these are for combat majors.

Most majors who have been struggling with enchantment will have their eyes opened to enchantment after drinking this, and those who already know how to enchant will quickly get the hang of it.

No matter how you slice it, it's still doping.

"Reinhard, would you like to try......?"

Anna brought me the pink liquid from the other container.

"Oh, Anna! Now, stop giving Reinhardt weird stuff!"

Herriot was horrified, but Anna crawled over to me.

I'm sure it's the same moonshine, but I'm so scared to give it to her! I think she's mixing something else!

"Don't drink that."

"Oh, no!"

Christina snatched the triangular flask from Anna's grasp and tossed it with a familiar flick.

-Bam!

At the very bottom, the flask shattered and the solution inside spread across the floor.

"Hey, Christina......!"

Herriot was rather surprised by Christina's outburst.

But neither Anna nor Christina seemed to mind the familiarity. Christina began to clean up the broken solution and glass shards as if it were an everyday occurrence.

How often does this happen, and why does Anna seem so used to being pampered?

Anna is scared, too.

Christina This one is scary in a different way.

"Is that....... What is that?"

"I don't know, Anna just keeps making things when she has time."

Did you just throw it on the floor without knowing what it was?

I think he's developed some toughness issues while working on Moonshine.

"Anyway, I'm pretty sure it's done, but it's going to be a long time before it's in the clinic, and it's going to be a long time before it's properly validated."

Christina holds up the triangular flask and looks at me.

"What do you say, do you want to try it? I'm sure it's safe, but I can't be responsible if something happens."

The finished moonshine. Christina is confident of its completion, but there may be side effects.

If you drink this, you will be the first person in the world to drink moonshine.

"No way."

"Well, you should probably stay calm and decide......."

I accepted the triangular flask. Harriet couldn't tell me not to drink it, but I could tell she was nervous about me drinking it, too.

Pink fluorescent material.

It looks like something you should never drink. In the original world, I would have been convinced it was radioactive.

Trusting in her abilities, I gulped down the pink fluorescent substance.

"Wow....... You really are spineless, aren't you?"

Christina was dumbfounded, as if she hadn't realized she was actually drinking it.

"What do you think?"

Christina asked me, her eyes gleaming as if she were curious about my reaction.

Needless to say, I didn't feel like I was powering up at all.

By the way.

But this is weird.

"Why....... delicious?"

No, this is delicious.

"Right?! Delicious!"

Christina is a bitch.

\* \* \*

She added an effect to Moonshine that wasn't in the original: flavor.

I don't know if overdosing will cause problems or not, but it was delicious enough to make me wonder if anyone would pass out from a moonshine overdose.

The effects of Moonshine were not immediately apparent. In fact, it would have been more frightening if the effect had been immediate.

You'll feel the effects of moonshine on your body over time.

The members of the Magical Research Society were all gathered together.

Me, Harriet, Adelia, Christina, Anna, Louis, and Ledina.

"Looks like you all met your goals somehow, good work."

All contributed to the research in their own way. Louis Ankton, for example, was involved in the production of both cartridges and moonshine, and was the de facto treasurer, running the budget.

We've all done things we didn't think were possible, and somehow we've gotten them done.

We did what no other magical research group has ever done, and we did it in less than half a year, not decades.

If someone heard it, they wouldn't believe it.

"Did you send your findings to Temple University?"

"Not yet, but since you're the president, I thought I'd show you the finished product first."

I'm only the nominal chairman, but we all recognize that I played a role in the end.

I was the one who told them to do something they wouldn't try because it was impossible, even if it was more of a push, and in doing so, I made the impossible possible.

"Well, let's start with the apology."

I organized my thoughts.

It's not for everyone.

A decision that everyone has to live with.

"Don't report it."

The look on everyone's faces turned strange at my casual remark.

If only I had known about Cantus Magna and Akasha first.

I wouldn't have asked these kids to do anything.

That I'd gotten out of order and put them all in danger.

"We're the only ones who know this thing was made, and it's a public failure. Let's do it that way."

I finally had to admit it.

\* \* \*

"What do you mean, all of a sudden?"

Harriet's wry expression epitomized what everyone was saying. As if we weren't already praising him enough, he didn't want to report his work and keep it to himself.

They are young wizards who make the impossible possible.

What Cantus Magna wants is magic.

Magic, not sobriety.

And the magic is made anew.

Cantus Magna will need more mages who can create a myriad of spells, rather than just a few.

Two miracles that would change the history of magic, even if they were royalty, ended up happening in high school clubs.

Word will spread, and they'll be bound to become stars in the magical world.

We'll focus on Cantus Magna, not the dungeons in Darklands.

If they're hell-bent on completing the Akasha, they're going to want a pollinator that can create magic.

The current Magical Research Society is an organization that Cantus Magna covets.

The results of this study should not be publicized.

If Cantus Magna reaches out to them and kidnaps them.

I'm not sure I can handle the situation.

So I can only say.

Let's pretend we didn't find anything.

Let's pretend it never happened.

Everyone wants to be recognized for the miracle of making the impossible possible.

But the guy who first suggested it wants to nullify all the consequences.

Not everyone will understand.

I wonder what else this lunatic is going to say.

It wasn't even that look.

Why?

Why should I?

I felt sad, frustrated, and even angry.

"Say something, tell me what's wrong."

Heriotman.

Only Herriot asks me what the hell is wrong with me and tries to get me to talk.

If the findings become known, the entire Magical Research Society is at risk. Just as the Black Order has infiltrated the Temple, so could Cantus Magna.

Fortunately, no one outside of the Magic Society knows that these two objects have been completed.

Reason.

I can't tell you about Cantus Magna.

But, then again, that's always been my specialty.

If there's no reason, create one.

"Demon."

The magic word that justifies everything.

Just as Bertus attached that magic word to the annihilation of the Republicans.

Even I, the devil, can add my own magic words.

"This is a very powerful strategic commodity, so to speak, that can objectively elevate humanity's power several notches above where it is now."

"And what will the devil think when he realizes that somewhere out there, he's dreaming of getting revenge on the humans, and this thing was made here, in your hands?"

"Don't you think we should get rid of it before you guys make something more dangerous?"

Everyone's complexions begin to turn white at my words.

When I said I needed to make Moonshine and Power Cartridges, the threat of a demon was not far off.

However, recent events have brought the threat of demons to the forefront.

"Not too long ago, something unfortunate happened."

Death of Duke Granz.

Everyone knew the story, so their faces became more serious. Herriot's complexion, in particular, took a turn for the worse.

"The devil is closer than you think."

Yeah, I know, I'm actually next to you guys and it's not a big deal.

Let's blame it on the devil.

Episode 384.

The threat of demons can strike someone suddenly. In fact, not long ago, Riana lost her father to a demon.

The event instills a sense of crisis about the demonic threat.

It's a great invention, but it's too big a threat for the devil.

So if it becomes public knowledge that you've created such a great invention, the devil may come after you.

"Maybe the demons are after us, maybe they'll kidnap us to use for their own ends."

Demon.

Abduction.

We are also reminded of the Charlotte de Gradias case.

"Do you understand what I mean?"

I say calmly, playfully, and seriously.

"You guys are building something so great that it could be dangerous."

It's dressed up as a demonic threat, but it's really a cantus magna threat.

"I see......."

Everyone was happy to have achieved their goal, and then I threw cold water on it.

But they looked like they'd been doused in cold water and had come to their senses. All they cared about was making it and succeeding, and they couldn't care less about the aftermath of the object.

Knowing nothing about magic, I thought about the current state of affairs on the continent and made a judgment call.

I'm lying.

It was a decision to protect my children.

"But if the demons attack later, shouldn't these two items make your army and mages stronger....... wouldn't it?"

Adelia says passively.

There were some who agreed.

Two powerful objects that will overwhelmingly increase humanity's ability to wage war. Instead of hiding in fear of the devil, you might think that this is the right way to make humanity stronger.

Maybe there is such a thing as a sense of justice for humanity.

It's for the peace of mankind, so we shouldn't have to put ourselves at risk, you might think.

"On the flip side, the Demon King's forces could grow stronger."

"......."

Rather, the devil may use them to build up his arsenal and kidnap you.

At my words, Adelia hung her head in disbelief.

"Nothing is more precious than your lives."

I look at everyone and say.

"Don't tell me you're willing to do anything to defeat the devil. None of you should have to die for anything."

You end up saying the clichéd phrase that the best is yet to come.

But what good is it if it's not alive?

Death can accomplish nothing but death.

I care about Harriet, and I care about everyone here at the Society for the Study of Magic. I didn't value them all in the same way, or to the same degree, but in the end, they've been loyal enough to comply with my unreasonable demands.

Can't hurt.

However, it's a good time to indulge in a flimsy sense of mission.

A giant threat to humanity is looming, and you have an object that could save them all.

To say that you should keep it sealed sounds overly selfish.

"But....... Reinhardt. If we make this public, I don't know if there will be another war or not, but....... maybe people will get hurt a little less."

Louis Ankton says cautiously.

You may feel selfish for hiding it. You may feel guilty about it.

It's not like the devil is trying to kill us or kidnap us.

"And if we ask the temple or the imperial court for protection....... they will protect us?"

It may not necessarily be dangerous. So you might think it's a bad idea to be so worried about your own safety that you hide these things.

Louis Ankton is a gifted academic, but selfish by nature. Frustrated by his inability to use magic, he joins the Magical Research Society because he thinks he might be able to do something with it.

And they did something that will go down in human history.

Louis wasn't upset that he wasn't allowed to present it.

In the ensuing chain of events, he seems to have realized that this work might be beneficial to humanity.

Not to show off my accomplishments and achievements, but because people need this work. It might be risky, but that's a risk I can live with.

Louis Anckton was also changed by the events that followed.

Sneaky.

But just because you think that doesn't mean it's true.

The devil is me.

Because the threat you face is not a demon.

The kids are watching me closely.

You never know when I'm going to have a temper tantrum and slap you in the face.

I'd rather just tell them what to do and say, "Hey, guys.

What happens when you do that.

However, I didn't want to do that this time.

It makes their hard work for nothing.

"Let's not."

I ask you, everyone.

"Please."

I can't tell you how much the urgency of my words was felt by them.

"......."

After all, he didn't say you have to do it.

\* \* \*

Despite the absurdity of it all, we eventually agreed to hide the fruits of our labor. Ostensibly to prepare for the threat of the demon, but my real intention was to hide the achievement from Cantus Magna.

It's a bit of a rip-off to the backers who have given us so much money, but so what? There was never any money to go back to them in the first place, even if the research turned out well. It was literally sponsorship.

She agreed with the idea of hiding the results for now.

"Still, don't you think something like Moonshine would be okay to give to my kids as long as it didn't have any side effects?"

We all nodded in agreement.

I didn't tell them what it was, just that it was some sort of nutritional tonic, and that it was okay to share it with my close combat students.

Of course, from my perspective, that's neither good nor bad.

If you can't stop the gate, you'd better raise the level of people who will respond to it across the board.

But is it right to give them moonshine?

Maybe it's not the monsters in the gate they're fighting, but me.

"Yeah, I can do that."

But I see no reason to stop there.

In the end, we agreed that I would hide the power cartridge, and Moonshine would share it with me since I was the first person to take it, and if there were no side effects.

She's confident that there will be no side effects, and I think so too, but we'll have to wait and see what the prognosis is.

Two days later.

We moved from a freshman dorm to a sophomore dorm.

\* \* \*

It wasn't even a move. You just pack up your stuff and go upstairs, and you don't even have to do it yourself, the temple's users do it for you. I don't have a lot of luggage, but some of the magic majors have a lot of luggage, and they've come and gone several times.

"You're up a level."

"Sure."

Still, it was a step up, and the realization of being a sophomore really hit me.

The dorms are pretty much the same from year to year, so it's not like there was a big change, just one floor up. The room numbers were the same.

I'm still in room A-11, and Ellen is in room A-2.

Come to think of it, it's room A-2 in sophomore year.

This was originally Adriana's room. It's probably been vacant for a while.

-Ah, this is here. Put it here. No, not there, here.

Herriot's door was wide open and he could hear her talking about the arrangement of things. Herriot seemed to have the most luggage of any of his classmates.

Ellen and I approached the railing in the main lobby on the second floor.

Being only on the first floor, I rarely had this view of the main lobby, but now I would.

"I don't think anything has changed, but I think something has."

I think it was me and Ellen who were both feeling a little frisky. In the main lobby of the ground floor, overlooking the street, stood Ceres van Owen.

Fifth grader Ceres Van Owen.

She and Olivia are now in sixth grade.

I heard that the student body president was forced to run for a second term because there were no volunteers. Being a very small royal class, there is rarely more than one candidate for student body president.

However, I think the student body president originally changed in my sophomore year, but then things changed and Ceres was elected. I think there may have been a butterfly effect there, but I don't know.

Ellen looked at the student body president standing in the lobby and seemed to reminisce.

When I got to Temple, the first person who greeted me was the student body president over there.

That said.

"Looks like the first graders are coming in today."

"I see."

As the seniors vacated their rooms, the first-years would move into the dorms before the end of winter break. Ceres was in the lobby, talking to boys and girls who looked like they'd just arrived for the first time.

Not all of them will arrive today.

As Ellen and I leaned against the railing and watched, we heard a voice behind us.

"What, juniors?"

Liana de Granz.

"I think so?"

"Hmmm."

Riana looked down at the railing and turned her head away, disinterested.

"Let's go."

"Yes."

Both Klippmann and Riana were dressed in sweatpants, so it was clear that they were going about their business rather than paying attention to the freshman.

Still, I would have been interested in it in the first place.

Now blind to anything but her own business, Riana left the dormitory with Klippmann through the first-floor lobby.

"......."

Ellen stared at the back of Riana's head as she did so.

I tapped such Ellen on the shoulder.

"We should get going."

We have to go to the training of the violinist Tana. It's getting close to the time she's scheduled, so it's time to gather in the second-year B class rehearsal hall.

So far, I've never been tardy, and I've never wondered what would happen if I broke the Grandmaster's training set instructions.

So now I'm dragging Ellen along.

"There's a junior who's a bit of a dick."

At Ellen's words, my gaze naturally shifted to the first floor lobby.

And, I couldn't help but roll my eyes.

"You have an unusual haircut."

Hair color.

Silver hair.

Kid.

The silver-haired kid.

Lucinil walked nonchalantly toward the royal class dormitory.

No.

Why are you here?

I have no idea what the hell is going on.

Gazoo of demand.

Lucinil the Lord Vampire has somehow become a first-year student in the Temple Royal class.

\* \* \*

I couldn't even ask her about Lucinil being my junior out of nowhere. There's no way I'd be able to find her, let alone talk to the freshman who'd suddenly appeared out of nowhere.

I couldn't help but fidget, not knowing what the hell was going on.

I never thought Lucinil would do something like this. How did she get through Temp Gate in the first place, how did she get admitted, how did she keep her identity straight?

"Let's just say it's a talent I found."

The answer, oddly enough, came not from Lucinil, but from Dr. Eppinhauser, who came to see me.

"I'm sorry I didn't tell you beforehand, but it was a last-minute agreement."

No.

It's ridiculous that Lucinil is now my junior, so why should I have to explain that to Dr. Epinhauser?

And this guy, from the way you're talking, it sounds like you're putting him in the royal class because he's a self-discovered talent. Are you going to do a guardianship or something like that?

"When we were talking about the dungeon, it came up that you might want to beef up your defenses."

"On our end?"

"It was a two-way street."

I'm sure the Black Order and the Vampire Council had a chat about this dungeon configuration issue.

Also, both the Vampire Council and the Black Order have told me that I need to increase my protection.

We can do that on our end.

The Black Order said they had to do something because I might be in danger.

I don't know if I'm impressed, but I'm really impressed.

"You have a lot of room to get yourself into trouble, not to mention Cantus Magna. We've all agreed that you need to have someone close by who can get you out of there in a pinch, and a Lord Vampire has very little power over you. Well, if you're not inconvenienced in your daily life, you shouldn't have any trouble disguising your Temple life."

I'm an important long-term piece for the Black Order, but I'm a high-growth prospect, not a super-skilled one right now.

Cantus Magna is a problem, and the Temple itself is an enemy if my identity is discovered, so the Black Order has decided that my own side, the side that knows my truth, must reside in the Temple.

"How in the world did you get in?"

"Getting through the temple's search gate shouldn't be that hard."

The identities and identities were vouched for by EpinHauser, and the settlement is not an issue for Lucinil.

I knew that the temple's binding devices and search tables weren't foolproof, but a mage of Lucinil's caliber could get in and out with impunity.

Of course, that's not because the temple is unprotected.

The Lord Vampire is an overly powerful mage.

In Eleris's case, there was no need to call it a temple; she had left the ecliptic.

Lucinil, who had been chosen to help me instead of Elise, decided to leave the Temple altogether when she realized I might be in danger.

Good.

The Black Order, the Council, and Lucinil must have made this judgment because they don't think I should die.

Dr. Effinghauser took a very big risk.

If Lucinil's identity is revealed, it's going to blow up all the way to Dr. Effinghauser.

Mr. Effinghauser, with his Patriot setting, has brought an impure entity called the Lord Vampire into the Temple.

That my existence is now so important to the order that I have to compromise my values to do this.

It's not that Mr. Epinhauser didn't know about Lucinil's admission, but rather that he took the initiative.

"We would have preferred to send a mage from the Order, but if you were one of ours, we wouldn't be able to trust you properly, which is why your people are being admitted. Remember that."

They wouldn't believe me if I put someone from their side, so I made an accommodation for Lucinil to come.

Black Order.......

In fact, aren't they the good guys?

I couldn't get the memory of Aaron Mede's shenanigans out of my head. Of course, that was just a personal aberration that had nothing to do with the Order's instructions.

\* \* \*

Lucinil's admission.

The reason is for my personal safety. Still, I'm the boss, and it's kind of weird that you didn't ask me anything.

I do.

It's a good thing he's treating me like a boss, because he's trying to protect me.

Of course, I got a post-mortem from Dr. Epinhauser, but I didn't get to talk to Rusinil.

The night all the new students move into the dorms, Ceres gathers them together to spread announcements and reminders.

Just like we did as freshmen, the seniors were clinging to the railing to watch the freshmen, and it was no different for the sophomores.

Some of the new faces were major characters from the original, but I wasn't interested in them.

The guy who is bound to stand out among the freshmen.

A kid with silver hair and an unusually short stature.

"Okay, A-11, why don't you introduce yourself?"

"It's Lucinil!"

An old woman who must have been hundreds, maybe even a thousand years old, shouted out in a refreshing way, pretending to be the youngest person in the room.

-Hey, look at him! He's so cute!

-See you later!

-Yes!

And then you see him squaring his shoulders, like he knows people are going to think he's cute.

What to say.

The.

I'm pissed.

\* \* \*

What happened to the talent reader? What talent did they get in with?

Anyway, I need to talk to Lucinil.

If you're in the Temple to protect me, you'll need to get to know Lucinil well enough that it won't be strange to have her around.

I tried not to pay attention to juniors, but a junior I couldn't help but care about got in. He's not even a junior in the first place.

So.

"Is that....... set......?"

"Yeah."

After I finished delivering the announcements, I grabbed the junior A student who was turning to leave and said.

"Assemble all first-year buds in the rehearsal hall."

So.

I'm not trying to be a jerk!

I need an excuse to run into Lucinil somehow!

\* \* \*

The first-floor Class A dormitory dance floor, which I returned to as soon as I moved in.

I was looking at eleven first-year students huddled on the practice field.

I didn't ask them to do that, but they were all lined up in a row, starting with number one. Lucinil, number 11, was standing on the far left, glaring at me.

With a look of excitement.

Lucinyl is kind of like the concept of an extra enrollment, so to speak, because in the original, the ten freshman A students who were ten are now eleven.

Somehow, I ended up with one more student than the original.

I'm not going to give you anything fancy. I was just going to introduce myself and move on.

"First of all, let me introduce myself, I'm Reinhardt, class A, year 2, number 11......."

"Eleven?"

I started to introduce myself, but the guy standing on the first right cut me off.

"Are you putting us together on topic 11?"

"......?"

What did I just hear?

As I stood there questioning my ears, the guy on the far right began to glare at me, his head cocked.

Correct.

As in the original, the freshman A-class assholes were the ones who were the worse for wear. The seniors in Class B were the ones who didn't treat them like seniors, which is why they got into trouble with Ludwig.

Among them, Grade A-1.

His name is Roberto de Gardenia.

Heir to the kingdom of Gardenia, he's also the first person you'd ever want to bite.

Talents were divine, magical, and martial.

It's #1, so it's no wonder it's a talent vending machine.

"Even if it's an A-class, it's still an A-class topic."

Roberto glares at me, stiffly, arms crossed.

I mean, what kind of an asshole is this?

I'm the one who wrote it, so it's my fault after all.

Still.

Uh.

"Even if you're a senior, you have to have some boundaries."

"Uh....... Hmm."

I didn't set this up to be a jerk.

"Do you want to get spanked?"

You're driving me crazy, aren't you?

Episode 385.

Roberto de Gardenia, freshman, A-1.

I didn't think I'd be able to talk back to my classmates.

Do you want to get beaten up?

I could tell that Roberto was taken aback by my sudden outburst.

Needless to say, the uneasy atmosphere froze.

"......Yes?"

"Are you teasing me because you want to get your ass handed to you, you bloody piece of shit?"

This guy is royalty, and he has an heir.

I don't think I've ever heard anything like that in my life. So there was a palpable sense of panic.

"Have you just insulted me, the rightful heir to the House of Gardenia?"

"......."

At that point, I froze a bit and did a couple of dry washes.

Feeling slightly sobered, I walked over to Liberto, who was giving me the eye of the enemy.

"Uh."

And.

-Bam!

"Ugh!"

I just threw it away.

"Gee, what are you doing......!"

He falls to the ground, grabs his shin, and cries out in panic.

"I, a commoner, publicly insulted the heir to the royal family of Gardenia or something, and I got my shins kicked in."

-Puck!

"Ugh!"

"So what are you going to do, you asshole?"

-Bam!

"Black!"

The one who kicked him in the side while he was on his stomach rolled across the smokestack floor.

"Did you forget you were told not to reveal your identity at the Temple?"

In a temple, identity becomes irrelevant.

Everyone was watching it come to life before their eyes.

He was still sprawled out on the floor, frozen, unable to comprehend the mercilessness of a royalty who claimed to be a commoner.

"Wake up, asshole."

"What you're doing to me right now, you're going to regret later......."

"Shit."

"Suck!"

He sucked in a breath and flinched as I went into a kicking stance.

Fuck you, asshole.

He was freezing up in real time, dumbfounded that he'd been picked on.

"Do you really want to search?"

"......."

"Do you want to rummage? Dude, answer."

"He, he......."

"Just answer yes or no."

"Oh, no......, I mean......."

I backed away slowly, watching him mutter in a low voice as he crawled away.

"Some assholes only talk when they're spanked. Get up."

"ugh......."

"Won't you get up?"

The kids, both boys and girls, were frozen in their tracks as they watched a senior rally and stomp on one of their classmates in real time.

Lucinil was particularly wide-eyed.

I glared at him as I watched Roberto get up. He glared at me through clenched teeth.

No, this asshole.

We're not quite there yet.

"Hit it if you're confident."

"......."

"But then I can't take responsibility for the situation."

"......."

"I'm in or I'm out, say it fast."

He looked like he was seriously considering it.

No, asshole.

Are you really trying to hit me?

-me, him....... Isn't that him?

However, I also heard some whispers.

-At the last festival, the freshman tournament winner....... that senior.

-Mah, right....... I think I saw it.

Speaking of which.

There were enough of them that would have seen my face if I had spent time at Temple before, not just this year.

Roberto didn't know me, but there were others who recognized me.

First-year tournament winner.

Liberto's face went white at that.

"Oh, no....... No......."

Apparently, being a first grade tournament winner was enough to get the brat to learn some manners.

As I watched him finally crush the snow, I glanced around at the first years.

Very, very atmospheric.

No.

I didn't sign up for this.

So this is what we're putting it together for?

I could feel them scrambling to avoid making eye contact with me.

Last year, when we were freshmen, she tried to give us an outfit to remind us that status doesn't matter.

And then, I did exactly that. Even worse, she failed, and I succeeded too precisely when I didn't intend to.

Happy temple life? No way!

And that's what happened?

"No, I didn't bring you guys here to tell you this shit in the first place......."

-click!

"Juniors, are you here?!"

And.

He bursts through the door of the training room, his face beaming with anticipation.

The.

Herriot de Saint-Ouen appeared.

"Uh....... You......?"

There's a moment when Harriet sees me already on the stage and gives me a look that says, "Why are you here?

My gaze shifts to the juniors lined up in front of me.

The juniors lined up in a row.

Far right.

Roberto (right) is dressed poorly.

The sight of everyone shaking their heads in contemplation.

Herriot's mouth begins to open in a daze.

The reports were also unbelievable.

"Nope. This is......."

"This, this, this....... this garbage!"

-Bam!

"Oh, no, no, no, no, no, it's true in the end, but it's not true!"

"This, this, this, all, anyone else, huh?! You! You do this!"

-Pak! pak-pak-pak!

"Now, wait! Really, really listen to me!"

Of course.

The excuses didn't work at all.

\* \* \*

The first-year students who witnessed the scene of a senior who was in a good mood suddenly bursting out at a female senior were left with a bewildered look on their faces, not understanding what was going on.

It seemed that Herriot had come to hang out, not to organize a group of juniors, but to get to know them. That's why I've been looking everywhere.

I ended up getting beaten up by Herriot and dragged away without accomplishing my goal of talking to Lucinil.

After being forcibly returned to my sophomore dorm, Harriet sits me down in the lobby and tells me with a serious look on her face.

"I am so purely disappointed in you."

"No....... It's not like that."

"If not that, then what?"

I'm trying to explain myself, but things are starting to get bizarre.

"What's wrong?"

Ellen, with a towel around her neck, approached, noticing that Harriet looked very upset.

"He's been scaring the crap out of the juniors."

"Scared...... in our freshman year?"

"That's right! And who did you hit? The kid on the far right, right!"

"No, he, uh, yeah, but he....... did hit me, but!"

You're right about the slap.

Ellen stares at me as she listens.

Contempt.

It was a gaze that felt itself.

It was the kind of crap that even Ellen couldn't stomach.

I don't know about anyone else, but especially not me.

"No, listen to me!"

That's unfair.

I'm kind of feeling sorry for myself because I actually did do that!

Whatever, it's unfair!

\* \* \*

I sat Ellen and Harriet down and gave them a proper explanation.

I was just there to make a statement, and he just got mad at me. Something like that.

Something like that.

In the end, it was one of those "the fan thing is true anyway" stories.

How dare you put us together on topic 11?

Her mouth dropped open in disbelief as she heard about the bullshit first-year bullshit that had started at .

"It's a good thing ...... isn't dead."

Herriot's reaction that it's weird that I didn't leave him half dead.

"There you go, good boy."

Rather, Ellen's response is that she did a good job.

What is this?

I hit it.

I did hit him.

They both praised me, knowing that I was a little less of a fan than they were.

Are assholes forgiven for being less of an asshole?

I feel good, but something's wrong!

Anyway, it's nice to get compliments from the kids, but I don't think I should hear them!

"I'll have to tell the juniors. Among the seniors, be especially careful with this one."

"That's a lot of work....... I guess."

As a result, we're going to have to aggregate them, but we're also going to have to warn them to be especially careful with the explosive substance called Reinhardt.

Even Ellen agreed.

No, really, I didn't mean to hit you. Seriously.......

Eventually.

Attempts to get a word in with Lucinil have failed in bizarre ways.

\* \* \*

In the original story, the sophomores in Class A would be rounding up the freshmen and taming them the way they were tamed as freshmen.

But the current sophomore A class is now a bunch of babies who don't give a shit about that, and Reinhardt did the same thing with Lucinil.

Eventually.

Harriet and Ellen gathered the first-year students once again to spread the word, but in a different way.

Instead of the dirty-looking male senior who was the first to show up, there was a calm and collected female senior and a female senior who had beaten up the dirty-looking male senior with a temper.

It doesn't look like it, but we're all on the edge of our seats after what we just saw.

"That....... I don't mean to yell at you. I just wanted to get you guys together after what happened earlier, and I need to tell you guys something. I'm sophomore A-4, Harriet de Saint-Ouen."

Herriot de Saint-Ouen.

"Ellen, second grade, A-2."

Ellen also introduced herself briefly.

Certainly, the two seniors who came to visit now were in a different mood.

There was never a hint of trying to scold anyone.

And.

Just as someone recognized Reinhardt, there were juniors who recognized Ellen.

"Hey, I'm....... Are you, by any chance, the winner of Miss Temple?"

Miss Temple.

The juniors, seeing Ellen for the first time, widened their eyes.

"Yes."

Ellen simply nodded her head in response to the question. Like winning the Miss Temple contest wasn't exactly a brag or a disgrace.

And the girl who recognized Ellen, of course, recognized Harriet.

"Well, I saw you in that unlimited weight tournament, where you beat a fifth grader!"

"Oh, yeah? That....... didn't win, he lost......."

"You abstained, you didn't lose!"

Reinhardt, the freshman champion, is great, but even better was Herriot, who took down fifth-grader Olivia Ranze in straight sets in the unlimited tournament.

It was an intense game that could have torn the stadium apart.

Herriot blanched as the junior recognized him, not sure if he was used to this sort of thing.

The first-year students began to stare at them blankly.

First-year seniors win the first-year tournament to determine the best of Temple's first-year students.

The calm-looking senior is the Miss Temple winner.

The senior with the forked hair is the one who beat the fifth grader.

Even in the Royal Class, second-year A's can't help but think that something is amiss. Lucinil looked at them with interest.

"Well, well, well, well, whatever. I didn't bring you all here to yell at you, I brought you here to tell you something."

Herriot coughs a few times as he tries to regain his composure and begins to speak to the juniors.

"The kid who just came for you is Reinhardt, and he's an asshole, too, so don't provoke him, especially you."

Herriot pointed to Liberto, who was on the far right.

"What? Ah....... Yes."

"You, Reinhardt, have been very kind to me."

Liberto had already watched Reinhardt do it and realized he was firmly in the wrong.

This is the place.

A place where commoners beat royalty if they dare to speak their minds.

No place to hide.

I've even gotten beaten up, and my seniors come over and tell me I'm less beaten up.

Strictly speaking, a temple is not a place like that.

But how the hell are new students supposed to know that Reinhardt is an overly weird guy?

The temple, or even the royal class, is supposed to be like this.

"Be careful in the future, I'm sure I remember your face."

You've been photographed by Reinhardt.

Herriot didn't even realize he was saying it.

Usually the most unaware people are the ones who say this the most.

"Be careful."

Also, Ellen, who was staring at Roberto, said briefly.

"You hurt yourself doing that."

Liberto's complexion turned even whiter at Miss Temple's soothing advice.

Ellen said this out of pure concern, because you can spit out words and not find a bone to pick.

The problem was that it never sounded like that to the listener.

Eventually.

Both Harriet and Ellen say they're not here to scare them, but Reinhardt is the one who is scaring them.

But it did lighten the mood a bit after that.

One by one, they talked about their majors, and as they talked, they realized that Herriot wasn't such a scary senior after all.

"Are you out of your mind?"

"Yes, I'm thirteen, and my major is magic."

The silver-haired girl, Lucinil, smirked and said so, and Harriet felt her heart tighten.

I was about to stroke his head when I stopped myself.

Major is Magic.

"Talent?"

"Destruction magic."

Destruction Magic Talent.

It's not the kind of talent that goes hand in hand with a cute face, but hey, not all talent comes with looks.

Herriot smiled as he listened to Lucinil's answer.

"Magic? Are you interested in the Magic Society?"

"The Magic Society?"

"Huh! It's a royal class club....... Actually, that asshole from earlier is the president, but he's actually not that bad....... He's actually really nice once you get to know him."

The corner of Lucinil's mouth twitched subtly at that.

"Ah....... Really?"

Without realizing it, Herriot was helping Reinhardt.

Episode 386.

The second semester of school has begun.

Things didn't work out the way I thought they would. I couldn't get the kids together again, so I signed up for a class with Ellen, thinking it would work out.

There were a few things that changed dramatically in my second year.

First of all, all of the swordsmanship classes that I was able to take with my regular classmates have been replaced.

The class has been reorganized into a Royal Class-only class and is much longer in duration. Royal and regular classes have been separated.

The reason was simple.

"The Temple will be secure, but we need to be prepared for any eventuality. And if the Temple is attacked, the Royal Class is likely to be the first target."

"You'll be getting a little more hands-on combat training this school year."

Classes have been transformed into combat training.

Instead of teaching skills, I started learning how to kill monsters, how to counter magic, how to fight, and how to behave in field situations.

This is what happened to the melee majors, and it's what's going to happen to the magic majors: they're going to start getting practical lessons from spellbooks.

Needless to say, the class became very intense.

And.

"......."

"This is Lucinyl. Take care."

I couldn't help but panic when I saw the Lucinyl that Herriot had brought to the Magic Institute.

No.

This is how it works?

Everyone was staring at Lucinil as a doll-like girl with silver hair and blue eyes appeared.

Even though it was right in front of me, I couldn't believe it was real.

"My talent is destructive magic, and Senior Saint-Tuan here asked me if I was interested in studying magic, so I came."

When he introduced himself as thirteen years old, my head spun for a moment.

No.

Grandma.......

I don't feel self-deprecating.

Of course, that's not my place to say!

"You met the chairman once before, didn't you?"

"......Yes."

Rusinil smiles sweetly and tells me so.

I think something is coming up.

I think it's going up!

"Hey, what's with the look on your face when you see this cute kid?"

I must have failed to hide my expression, because Harriet put her arm around Lucinil's shoulders as she sat down next to her.

"No....... I'm feeling a little under the weather......."

The look on Lucinil's face, as if she's so happy to have been pampered by her senior, is so.......

It was something, something.

\* \* \*

"What are you doing?"

"Security."

When I told him, he just shrugged his shoulders and said.

I had just brought Lucinil to my room to talk to her about joining a club.

I've been in the temple for a while, but this was the first time I'd ever seen them face to face.

Rusinil said she had noise-canceling throughout the room to make it easier to talk.

So I'm comfortable talking about it.

"No, I think you're enjoying it too much for that."

"What the hell, you say?"

Uh.

That.......

I'm not supposed to enjoy it, but I'm the one enjoying it the most, right?

"You're in the tournament, and the rumors about you are....... something."

Lucinil glances at me, arms crossed, as if to say, "You said it right.

"Did he look good when he sold it?"

"......."

Yes!

Well, that wasn't what I was going to say!

Uh!

Sorry!

I know I shouldn't be doing that!

I'm not kidding!

"But are you sure this is okay? That....... I guess everyday life is......."

"I can handle the sunlight, I don't mind eating because I can throw up or spit it out afterward, and I've pretended to be a human so many times I'm sick to death of it."

Roussinil shrugged, as if pretending to be a normal human being was the hard part.

"But you should know that this wasn't an easy decision."

Rusinil looks at me with a serious expression.

"Your life could be in danger at any moment to the point where I have to go in here myself."

It is true that Lucinil entered the Temple at great risk. She came to the Temple to protect me.

"So I don't know if I want to sit here and watch the babies play, but it's what it is, and you have to accept it."

"I see your point....... I don't know why, but is it just me or do I feel like you're being self-serving?"

"Hmmm......."

At my words, Lucinil's brow narrowed, and she chuckled.

"I can't deny it. I love it when someone cuddles me, and I love it when the kids who cuddle me are cuter than me."

Real.

All road vampires are lunatics.

And I don't think it's Lucinyl, but it's definitely the craziest.

This is weirder than Antony!

"Let's be friends from now on. I don't want you to feel uncomfortable around me."

It's a very sobering thought, and Rusinil is right a hundred times over.

I'll use the fact that I'm a junior in the Magical Research Society as a connection to Lucinil, which isn't really something I thought of, and I'll just make it up as I go along.

But.......

Psychologically, I hate it.

\* \* \*

Lucinil joined the Society for the Study of Magic.

There were other magic majors in my freshman A class, but when they realized I was the president of the Magic Society, they shied away.

That's why Lucinil is the only one of the magic majors to join the Society.

The first semester of my sophomore year began, and I had juniors. Of course, I didn't have much contact with them. Ludwig and the B-class guys would often hang out with the juniors and I could see that.

So I agree with you that it shouldn't be weird for me to be seen with Lucinil, given that I'm a junior in the Magic Society, and that I've gotten to know her through that connection. I thought about that too.

By the way.

"Sir?"

"Senior!"

"Senior!"

"Brother!"

Mental.

I think I'm getting out!

"Stop looking for me!"

I couldn't help but be freaked out by Lucinil, who was following me around at an almost stalking level.

I wasn't sure if she was doing her job or just trying to annoy me, but she shamelessly followed me in and out of my sophomore dorm, looking for me and trying to stick around.

This is harassment, not security.

He's having fun watching me hate it, that's for sure.

My classmates were also a bit puzzled by Lucinil's strange fondness for me.

The clincher was Bertus.

"......."

"Hello, sir."

Lucinil inclined her head toward Bertus, whom she had met in the hallway.

"Oh, the one who said he was halfway through his freshman year......."

"Lucinil."

"......."

Bertus stares at Lucinil, who nods at him.

A girl with silver hair and blue eyes.

Junior.

And then there's Bertus, who's been following me around but doesn't really know what's going on.

And.

I was a cross-dresser with silver hair.

"......you just in case."

Silver hair and all.

Is there such a thing.

Bertus started to say something, but ended up saying nothing at all.

No!

It's obvious you think I'm dirty.

I think I've convinced you that I have a silver-haired fetish.

"Hmm?"

Lucinil shook her head as Bertus scurried away.

"Reinhard! What are you doing?"

And Olivia Ranze, returning to her sophomore dorm for the first time in a long time, shook her head at the silver-haired kid clinging to my side.

"......Whose kid is this?"

"It's my baby!"

Olivia took another drink.

\* \* \*

After the freshmen moved in, there was a pretty bizarre spectacle among the sophomores.

-Brother! Play!

-Leave me alone, huh? Stop following me around!

-Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

-Ahhhhhh!

Reinhardt has a new junior following him around.

Open-ended death penalty.

Heinrich, Erich, Kaier, and Kono Lindt.

The four of them sat in the lobby and watched as the silver-haired girl followed Reinhardt around, and he ran away in disgust.

"That asshole....... What the hell is......?"

Konorint mumbles, his mouth open in a daze.

"He's handsome."

Erich muttered in despair.

As soon as the school year starts, a cute, doll-like girl follows you around. At first, she called you "senior," then "senior," and now she calls you "brother.

"No, no matter how good-looking you are, that's about it, huh?"

Heinrich shook his head in disbelief at Kaier's words.

"I don't know if it's that bad....... No, we're men, so maybe we don't know."

I wondered if there was something about Reinhardt that only appealed to women, and if there wasn't, I couldn't understand how he could be so enamored of a first-year student without really knowing her.

"And I'm sick and tired of her following me around."

Everyone nodded as Conor Lint spoke.

As if that weren't enough, Reinhardt doesn't like it.

She doesn't even pay attention to the other seniors, but she follows Reinhard relentlessly, and he avoids her like she's the most annoying thing in the world.

It's the luxury of the rich.

"Have you seen Reinhardt?"

And as if to prove the idea, Ellen, last year's Miss Temple, approaches them and asks for Reinhardt.

"That....... dodged that freshman girl and went somewhere else."

"Again?"

Ellen shakes her head and walks off to find Reinhardt.

Reinhardt here, Reinhardt there.

It used to be that way, but now the juniors join in, and they're looking for Reinhardt, and the kids who were looking for him are looking for him.

The leeway of the haves.

"The world is....... unfair......."

"So."

Erich sighed heavily and agreed with Konor Lindt.

-Brother, if you don't know magic, why are you running off to the magic lab?

-Leave me alone!

-No, it's not me, it's Ellen.

-uh? ah....... Really?

Eventually.

Reinhardt is a handsome man.

So it became a situation where the new kid on the block was following Reinhardt around, and everyone assumed it could happen.

\* \* \*

When they were alone, Lucinil's tone changed.

Of course, even when we were alone, I was confident that if I whined in a baby voice, I would drive him literally insane.

I have to admit, I get goosebumps when I see him babble in front of Harriet, Ellen, and Adelia because he's so childlike.

Lucinil clung to my side, half guarding, half teasing, but I couldn't let that continue.

-Ka-ching!

"Boom!"

Finally, seeing Tiamata slip from her grasp, Saviolin Tana deactivated the Auror Blade.

"Let's call it a day."

Tana was still watching me and Ellen's swordplay.

"You're both getting better at enchantment sensitivity. Continue as you are."

"Yes, sir."

After Tana left, Ellen and I sat down on a bench in the performance area and took a moment to catch our breath.

The effects of taking Moonshine were evident. I could feel my body becoming more and more accustomed to the enhancement, whether it was due to the control of magic or the fact that Moonshine had changed the way I felt magic.

I haven't gotten to the point where I'm using the energy released aggressively, but I think I'll get there this semester.

"How long do you have to be a Swordmaster?"

Ellen asked out of the blue.

With her lapel, Ellen is already a Swordmaster. However, if she were to reach mastery on her own, she would be much stronger than she is now.

"......don't know."

For Ellen, it's not too far in the future.

I don't think I'm that far off, either. But I had this subtle feeling that being a Swordmaster would mean that the hardships would be right in front of me.

\* \* \*

The good news is that Lucinil didn't get into any fights with the others. Herriot just seemed to love her, and Ellen, while we didn't interact with her much, would watch her and rub her cheeks and stroke her hair.

I felt like I was being coddled, even if I didn't show it.

In Olivia's case, Lucinil avoided her. Not because she thought she might be caught, but because Lucinil sensed the immense divine power of Tuan in Olivia.

I said in passing, "I can't have her, she's too much of a burden. It seemed to be a level of divine power that would make even a Lord Vampire cringe.

Of course, Olivia, who has been grumpy lately, hasn't been cuddly or pretty with Lucinil.

It's just that Lucinil avoids her whenever she comes into contact with her, so there's a bit of a "what's wrong with her?" vibe. She doesn't bother me, so I leave her alone.

It didn't even seem like Olivia was particularly wary of her, as she would stop clinging to me and move away when she saw her.

The first semester of my sophomore year started without any major incidents, and my daily routine didn't change much, except for the arrival of Lucinil.

But.

Now there was one big event coming up.

A second grade classroom on a day of common learning. Mrs. Effinghauser looks at us and says, "I'm sorry.

"As you know, the one-year anniversary of the end of the Demon War was planned to take place this weekend."

One year anniversary of the end of the Demon War.

That event is coming up soon.

"However, due to the current political situation, it is not feasible to hold a large-scale festival, so it has been canceled for now."

A different story.

Now that the devil's elixir is clear, the one-year anniversary of the end of the war has convinced us that the war never really ended, and there will be no such thing as an end-of-war ceremony.

But this event is very important.

"Instead, the Empire decided to find a new owner for Alsbringer."

A hush fell over the classroom as Mr. Effinghauser spoke.

This is probably the first time you've ever heard of it.

"Therefore, the entire Royal Class is to assemble in the Great Hall of the Temple General Headquarters by noon this weekend."

One year anniversary.

There, the Alsbringer, the sword of the warrior Artorius, chose Ludwig as its new owner. It was not the Imperial family's intention to do so; at the very moment the Alsbringer was to be unveiled to the public as a memento of the end of the war and a testament to humanity's triumph, it went to Ludwig of its own accord.

But the event is gone.

There's a new demon on the loose.

So, unlike in the original, the Empire was trying to find a new owner for Alsbringer.

The more holders of relics, the better.

If you choose Alsbringer as your master, you now have a total of four holy relics in the world.

Lament, Tiamata, Alsbringer, and Lapelt.

This would be the first time in history that four holy objects would appear simultaneously in the same era.

Ellen stared at the board, her face blank.

It's the moment when your brother's artifact reappears in the world and chooses its owner.

Episode 387.

At the moment of birth, everything is determined. What a person can do, what a person can accomplish in life, some with limitations and some without.

If you weren't born with an identity, you should be born with a talent.

It's all about being human.

Roberto de Gardenia thinks so.

As the first in line to the throne of the Kingdom of Gardenia, and one of the most gifted children in the history of the Gardenian royal family, it's no wonder Liberto is so consumed with such thoughts.

While not quite as powerful as Cernstadt, which is considered the most powerful empire, Gardenia is one of the most powerful countries in the world, and as such, Liberto's status as the next king is quite high.

When he was admitted to Temple, the Royal Class, where only the best and brightest were admitted on talent alone, regardless of status, and even there he was given the number A-1, the number one talent ranking in his class, he knew without a doubt that he was one of the first in the world, and fit for a king.

"Do you want to get spanked?

Until it was suddenly blown up by a sophomore.

Roberto thought he'd responded in a pretty gentlemanly way. If the royal class is a place where talent, not status, divides the hierarchy, then he is at the top of the list. Even if you're A-class, you can't be the same.

Given the fact that the most senior person in the room had at least used some form of honorific for putting him on a topic that was only number eleven, Roberto thought he'd been pretty polite in his response.

But what came back was violence.

It never occurred to Liberto that he was being rude. The mere fact that a boy who had lived in a palace and looked down on everyone but the king had used an honorific to address someone, even if it was a commoner, said it all.

Number 11 was beaten by a commoner, for the sole reason that he was a year ahead of him.

At the time of the meeting, I unwittingly said no when asked if I really wanted to try it, but Roberto regretted it.

I wish I could have shown that cheeky commoner the swordsmanship of the Kingdom of Gardenia.

Winning the first grade tournament? Roberto didn't know what winning the tournament meant. He hadn't seen it in person.

So, if the cocky commoner tried to challenge me again, I was more than willing to crush him. I'll show him the true meaning of swordsmanship in the Kingdom of Gardenia.

In addition to restoring your tattered dignity and honor,.......

"What is it?"

"Oh, no."

"Roll your eyes, I'm going to yell at you, asshole."

-tuk-tuk

Reinhardt walked by and slapped him on the cheek as he passed by, but he was too stunned to say anything.

A person is.

It's hard to overcome fear when it's ingrained in your bones.

Liberto glared at the back of Reinhardt's head as he walked past, his eyes twinkling as if he were nothing, even giving him a rude peck on the cheek.

"!"

Suddenly, Reinhardt turned around, and with lightning speed, the snow fell.

"If you're going to open it, open it."

Reinhardt laughs, as if he has eyes in the back of his head.

"Do one, asshole."

This time Roberto didn't even look at Reinhardt's back as he turned away.

\* \* \*

To Roberto de Gardenia, Reinhardt, a sophomore, was nothing more than a fan-rude plebeian who had unnecessarily assembled him from day one.

But my classmates seemed to have a different idea.

"You know, the guy from last time."

"Oh, that....... Reinhardt?"

"Yeah, him."

It was such a strong impression that even though there were three seniors, Ellen, Herriot, and Reinhardt, the first impression of Reinhardt was very strong in everyone's memory.

Sicilla von Glaione, Grade 1, A-7.

He was an honored member of the Countess of Glione's family, a longtime student at Temple's elementary school. He was a classmate who recognized Reinhardt, as well as Harriet and Ellen.

Her talents include spearmanship and magic sensitivity. She was one of the most talented combat majors.

Sicila was sitting in the lobby of her freshman year, chatting with her classmates. Roberto pretended not to be listening, but was surreptitiously eavesdropping on the girls' conversation.

They don't think they're eavesdropping. They just think that the story is flowing naturally into their ears.

"Honestly, isn't he handsome?"

At Sisilla's words, Roberto resisted the urge to jump out of his seat.

What the hell is so handsome about that parasitic oraby?

After raving about it in his mind, Roberto held down the fire that was about to burst.

"Really......? I was so scared then that......."

"That looks scary......."

The two who answered were Rosier, A-3, and Cadina Ein, A-10, who remembered their first impression as being very frightening, as they watched the senior stomp on Liberto with such ferocity.

"No, it was just that time, you're not usually that angry. Is it just an impression or something......?"

It was clear that Sicila was more concerned about Reinhardt's seniority than the first impression she had made at the tournament.

Even the majors are melee.

"He's so good! He was already able to do magical enhancements as a first grader that even third graders can't do now? I've seen it with my own eyes."

"Are you sure......?"

Enchantment.

The words seemed to stop Roberto in his tracks.

It's a high-level combat skill that a lot of picked and cherry-picked talent can train for over a decade and never realize. To be able to do that already in first grade.

Roberto felt like screaming at him to stop lying.

"I want to get to know you......."

Sisilla's flirtatious comment made Roberto's already tangled judgment even tighter.

"I thought you and Lucinil were already close?"

The girl with the distinctive silver hair, number eleven in the first year class, almost lived in the second year dormitory.

"So....... how the hell did he do that? I'll have to ask him later."

Reinhardt.

Just hearing the name made Roberto's stomach turn.

I want to punch it in the face somehow.

Enchantment? He must have done something dirty. There's no way a commoner, let alone a Temple, could have realized a magical enhancement that even he, a man who had the full backing of the royal family, ate everything that was good for him, and trained in the best of environments, could have realized faster than he did.

Liberto vows to uncover Reinhardt's dirty laundry one day.

A few days later, Liberto headed to the Temple's main auditorium for the weekend.

You said you were looking for the owner of Alsbringer.

It's not like I didn't have a little bit of hope that it might be me.

What if you became the owner of Alsbringer?

I am honored that the holy relic has chosen me, as I am a descendant of Gardenia, but I worry that I will have to say no, as my royal duties must take precedence. And then there's the matter of how to deal politically with our uneasy relationship with the Order of Alth.

Well, you can only think about it so much, and it's not like it's impossible.

Roberto had even thought about it.

Determined to do so, Roberto de Gardenia was faced with an unbelievable sight.

"......."

-Woof

When I saw Reinhardt being chosen by Alsbringer, I couldn't help but think that something was very wrong.

-Alsbringer.......

-reinhardt.......

-Select Alsbringer from.......

There was a lot of commotion around.

As he watched, however, he noticed something uncomfortable about the look on Reinhardt's face.

Chosen by a Relic.

By the way.

Like.

He had the look of someone who had just done something he hated.

Reinhardt's expression stiffens, faced with the immense honor of being chosen by the Holy One.

Liberto saw the look on Reinhardt's face and couldn't help but realize.

A gut feeling that this person is somehow different, qualitatively different from you.

\* \* \*

Alsbringer, the warrior's sword.

An object that can summon the war god Als. However, it comes at a cost. Ragan Artorius summoned the war god to defeat the demon, and it cost him his life.

There were two holy relics in the original.

Rament and Alsbringer. Ellen's sword, Lament, was a very sharp sword, with the effect of an Auror blade. Ellen was unable to draw upon the true power of the artifact.

Alsbringer's true power is to summon war gods. So technically, Alsbringer is a holy object, but it's unbalanced because it's too powerful on its own. That's why we added the idea that the true power lies within the lament, but Ellen hasn't been able to tap into it.

I know this much about Alsbringer.

Saturday.

The Great Hall of the General Headquarters, where the entire Royal Class is gathered.

There weren't that many people.

The Imperials are now looking for a new owner for Alsbringer.

The owner may not choose to be a member of the Royal Class. If so, it will try to find the owner elsewhere.

"With the Demon King's forces at a low ebb, the Empire needs new warriors. Perhaps such a one can be found among the students here."

The Emperor stood in the banquet hall, facing the entire Royal Class, and said.

"If the master of the Alsbringer is chosen here, you will have to keep it a closely guarded secret. The Devil will want to destroy the next master of Alsbringer before he becomes a huwan."

We're trying to find a new owner for Alsbringer.

And if you do find the owner, you must keep its existence a closely guarded secret.

The tension on everyone's faces was palpable. They realized that they were so close that the name Demon King was almost touching their skin.

As such, the Empire would look to up-and-comers or militant groups like the Knights Templar and Royal Class to find new warriors.

As such, there were fewer than two hundred people in the room, including the Emperor, the highest-ranking priests of the Order of Alth, and the entire Royal Class.

The process was complicated.

But only the results are in front of you.

I was floating in thin air, watching the Alsbringer, waiting for me to grab it.

All eyes were on me, the chosen one of Alsbringer.

It was supposed to be Ludwig's.

Originally, this should have been Ludwig.

If I say no, will Alsbringer choose a different owner?

I could reject it, and Alsbringer could accept my rejection and go to another master.

It is very likely to be Ludwig.

That is.

How is this different from asking Ludwig to die instead of me.

Ludwig does not know the true power of the Alsbringer, but he will learn it in time.

The inscription on Alsbringer's sword hilt glowed with a brilliant light.

[It shall be done by sacrifice].

The keyword in Alsbringer is sacrifice.

Actually, this was expected.

This sword.

Alsbringer.

This is the kind of sword that chooses as its master only those who can die for the world.

Everyone is looking at me.

Some were jealous, some were appalled, and some seemed to approve.

-Flash!

I gripped the War God's blade. It glowed with a fierce light, as if it recognized me as its master.

-twinkle

Emperor.

Neliod de Gradias's applause echoed through the packed auditorium.

Soon there was a lot of applause from others.

The situation was pretty simple.

Alsbringer.

For the record.

I was chosen by the thing that killed my father.

\* \* \*

It shall be a secret that I have become the master of Alsbringer. However, I do not know how well that secret will be kept. However, a strict gag order has been placed on all those present.

The Empire will have to guard this secret closely, lest I be killed by the Devil, and the Royal Class students who witnessed this spectacle will be asked to keep it strictly confidential.

Unaware that it was the Devil who chose Alsbringer.

Anyway, while I've managed to hide my ownership of Tiamata, my ownership of Alsbringer is now known to quite a few people.

It's not official, but I've become the chosen one of the Holy Grail.

Of course, I had no choice but to speak with the Emperor himself, who had witnessed the ritual of finding the owner of the Alsbringer.

"Master of two holy objects."

The emperor was looking at me with a solemn expression.

"Maybe I have more than Ragan Artorius in front of me."

Lagan Artorius also had two holy relics, but he only carried one in his fight with the demon.

I had no answer to the emperor's calm words.

In fact, Ellen also has two holy relics, but she doesn't talk about them.

The emperor laid his hand on my shoulder; it would have been a great honor for him to touch me in person.

"Reinhardt."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"......."

He just looked into my eyes and didn't say anything for a while. I wanted to say something, but I couldn't seem to get the words out.

Finish.

"......You've become too important to ask for personal favors."

He smiled bitterly, not answering what he was going to say in the end.

"I ask for the future of humanity."

I don't think the word empire was intentional.

The future of humanity.

Yes.

The future of the world, beyond even that.

That's what I want.

"Somehow, I'll get it done."

I have a nuclear weapon in my hands.

A nuclear weapon that I must use with my life.

It doesn't change the fact that it's a hack.

\* \* \*

The emperor encouraged me and then quietly returned to the palace. As if nothing had happened, even though a great event had taken place.

As if nothing had happened, the group gathered in the General Headquarters dispersed and I returned to my Royal Class dorm.

"I don't know if this is something to celebrate."

"I think it's a pain in the ass. We already have a holy grail."

"So."

Ellen didn't seem to think it was a very good thing that I had become the owner of the Alsbringer. Sure, it's nice to have a holy object, but she seemed to think it might be a problem if other people knew about it.

Ellen said something like that, and then she said something else.

"Well, you can talk to me later, but for now, go see Harriet."

"Why the paktong?"

"He's crying."

What?

Why is she crying all of a sudden?

Are you crying because my Reinhardt was chosen by the Holy Grail?

Why?

But.

The reality was completely different.

"Ugh!"

When I got to her room, she just hugged me and sobbed.

"Don't do it, don't do anything, don't do anything. Huh? Ew! Ew! Ew!"

a.

For Herriot, holy relics meant something else.

Herriot doesn't know I have Tiamata.

I realize that now that I'm the owner of the relic, I'll inevitably have to fight the devil.

Because I think I'm going to die.

I was crying because I was afraid of it.

"I'm scared....... I'm so scared, Reinhard....... Ew! Black! Hmph!"

"No....... What's the point of dying?"

"Still....... But......."

In my arms, Herriot sobbed as if the world would fall apart.

"I'm not dying."

"Lord, if I die....... You can't die. Do you understand? Don't, you're fighting the devil. Don't make a scene. Don't do that. Okay? Promise me. Promise me......."

"Okay. Why would I do that, huh? I'm not going to die."

"Black....... Me, I'm strong too....... By all means, you....... I'll protect you......."

"Yeah, yeah."

I became the owner of a holy artifact that would kill me if I unleashed its true power.

I'm not going to die.

I comforted Herriot.

\* \* \*

If this were a public event, there would be a frenzy, and the name Reinhardt would be carried to every corner of the continent.

However, due to the timing, it remained quiet even after Alsbringer chose a new owner.

Even inside the Royal Class dormitories, the singing of the Alsbringer was strictly forbidden. Teachers were very strict about initiation, and the way my seniors and juniors looked at me became awe-inspiring, like they were looking at someone from another dimension.

Of course, if you want to talk, you can, although it's strictly forbidden.

Olivia came to see me, too.

"......."

Now that I'm the owner of the relic, I can't help but believe that the devil and I are destined to fight. Just as Herriot did, so does Olivia.

Olivia held me still. I knew why, and this time I couldn't push her away.

Olivia stroked my hair.

Olivia was saved by the Devil. Therefore, if the Devil and I were to fight, Olivia would be in trouble. Olivia doesn't seem to hate the Devil at all right now.

"I'm on your side."

"......."

"I'm on your side, no matter what."

If I were to fight a demon, he seemed more than willing to become the enemy of the one who had saved him.

But those words have a different resonance for me now.

"I know."

Olivia Ranze.

She'll be on my side, even if she knows I'm a demon.

\* \* \*

Everyone looked at me a little differently.

Ludwig has taken something that should have belonged to him, and he doesn't realize that the Alsbringer should have been his.

Honestly, I don't feel too self-conscious about stealing it.

If I give this to a guy who's ready to sacrifice himself for humanity at any moment, he might use it against me.

For Ludwig's sake, for my sake, it's right that I take ownership of this.

"I'll try my best, too, so I can be of some use to you."

"Yeah."

Ludwig said.

"You're....... That's awesome."

Klippmann said.

"If you kill the demon, I can marry you."

"What the hell?"

"Let's not die anyway. Neither of us."

Riana looked at me and said something offhanded like that, bumping my shoulder as she walked by.

"That's great, Reinhard. Even Alsbringer has chosen you."

Charlotte congratulated me with a big smile on her face, as if she thought that getting stronger couldn't be a bad thing.

And.

"Master of two holy objects."

On the terrace, Bertus looked at me and said.

I figured I'd find out someday, but Bertus, as always, already knew.

Episode 388.

On the terrace, Bertus and I were having tea for the first time in a long time.

Two holy relics.

I already knew I was the master of Tiamata. When Saviolin Tana warned me, I had some sense of it.

Bertus looked like he was about to say something, then hesitated slightly, as if the words were caught in the back of his throat.

My fingertips tremble.

You asshole.

I'm thinking about that again!

"......."

Bertus mumbled something and then said nothing, as if he believed that talking was already showing.

"Well, never mind, that's not the point. That you have the choice of two holy objects. That's all that matters."

Yes.

Let's get that out of our heads.

I'm sure we'll get to the real messy stuff soon, but I'm tired of being messy in this way.

If you're good enough to be chosen for two holy relics, you're a Ragan Artorius-level badass, so why the hell are you cross-dressing?

I don't want to hear about that!

Bertus stares at me with a serious expression.

"I have a lot of questions, Reinhardt."

"......Yes."

"Not that one, asshole!"

"Oh, I didn't say anything?"

Bertus and I couldn't be serious after that incident!

"Charlotte."

But when the name came up, I couldn't help but calm down.

"You did this, didn't you?"

It's about knowing and asking.

I can't deny it. I didn't ask specifically what you did or how you did it, because I don't think that's necessary.

"Yeah."

"Yeah, it's nice that you're not just throwing things out there without meaning to."

You already know everything about me and Charlotte. Bertus adds milk to his black tea and stirs it with a teaspoon.

"Reinhard, I can't touch you anymore, and you're not an idiot, I think you know that."

"......."

Not one, but two holy relics.

It makes no sense to kill or harm me. My existence has become so important that the option of touching me has been eliminated. Even if I were on Charlotte's side.

That's the scary thing about Bertus.

Don't say what or how much you know.

How much we know about Charlotte's current condition, whether we know that we saved her life or how we did it.

You don't expose it at all, and then suddenly say you know the middle ground of truth as if it were a given.

Confuse the listener.

So, I don't know where to stop, and if I do, I'll say something that Bertus doesn't know.

It's a snake-like way of speaking.

"Reinhard, you can be on Charlotte's side, but being my enemy is another choice. You can't be on Charlotte's side and be on my side, but being on Charlotte's side doesn't necessarily make you my enemy."

Bertus stares at me.

"Are you going to be my enemy? Let's make sure of that."

What happens when you tell someone they're going to be your enemy.

Bertus won't say anything about it. He may leave me alone for now, or he may do something about it.

"I'm not going to do that."

"Yeah, that's what I'm hoping for."

It's not what it used to be.

I'm not just a Royal Class student, I have two holy relics. Unless you know that Ellen also has two, I am the only person in the world with two holy relics.

Just as I don't want to have Bertus as an enemy, he doesn't want to have me as an enemy.

Bertus takes a sip of his milk tea.

"By the way, Reinhard, do you know that?"

His expression turns cold.

"The race to the throne is already over."

Bertus declares coldly.

"Charlotte can't be emperor."

I wasn't surprised.

Bertus crushed one of the Empire's greatest threats: revolutionary forces.

That's not all.

While Charlotte hasn't even been able to get herself together, Bertus has been taking care of a lot of things.

Unlike Charlotte, who has had to deal with the aftermath of her demonic abduction, Bertus has proven himself time and time again. Continued from Where I Am Not.

Charlotte, who can't do anything.

Bertus, who kept showing me things.

The imperial succession would have tilted slowly under those circumstances, and after the events of the Revolutionary Forces, it would have passed completely to Bertus.

Bertus's exploits were not publicized, of course, but the emperor would have known about them.

The dice have been rolled, and the results are already known.

"Of course, all of that aside, the mere fact that she's possessed by a demonic spirit means that Charlotte's path to becoming Imperial Emperor has already been cleared."

Did you know that?

The demon's soul and Charlotte's soul were inseparable. As long as Bertus knew this, all it would take would be for him to mock her and her life would be over.

"Reinhard, I don't know if you'll believe me when I say this, but I don't want to kill my brother."

He said it with such a cold expression that it was even harder to believe what he was saying.

"Why do you think that is?"

Because they are siblings.

That would never be a reason. A reason would mean that it's better not to kill Charlotte after all.

There's only one reason.

"...... Is it me?"

"Yeah."

Any harm to Charlotte would make me an enemy of Bertus. I am determined to do so, and Bertus will know it if he knows what I have done. And Bertus has told me that he does not want me as an enemy.

"I think I'd get a chill down my spine if I had an out-and-out lunatic like you as an enemy."

Reinhard the school bully becomes Reinhard the bully warrior. The scope and scale of what you can do changes.

Finally, if Lagan Artorius had lived, no one in the world would have been able to treat him with such disrespect, and no one would have sought to be his enemy.

If you kill Charlotte, you will have me as an enemy.

That's why Bertus says it's good for him not to kill Charlotte. Because the existence of the country has become an obstacle.

"Well, I have no choice but to kill Charlotte."

"......Why?"

"There's no reason to keep her alive. Charlotte's very existence already affects my imperial power, which means that if she lives, whether after I'm crowned the next emperor or after I'm crowned, they'll be telling me a hundred times a day to kill her. They'll be saying it in my ear for days, months, and years, and if I refuse, they won't understand me, and my subjects would rather have a cruel monarch than a weak one, that's for sure. I can't afford to discredit them by letting Charlotte, a strong contender for the throne, live for no good reason, can I?"

A strong imperial heir, if he survives the elimination, is in itself a threat to the empire. It's not out of the realm of possibility that there could be an uprising of supporters to replace Charlotte, or that there could be a movement to support a new emperor if Bertus screws up.

There would be no reason to keep Charlotte alive, and Bertus would be forced to kill her against his will.

You don't want to kill it. But it must be killed.

Charlotte said something like that.

If you don't become emperor, you will die.

From the beginning, their fight was about becoming emperor or dying. At both forks in the road, they were unable to determine their opponent's life or death by their own will.

If you survive, you must kill your opponent.

However, Bertus is in a situation where if he kills Charlotte, he will have made an enemy of the state.

"This is the problem. If you die fighting a demon, I don't know, but if somehow things work out and you kill the demon and become the hero of mankind and I become emperor, I don't know what you're going to do to me because you're out of your mind. But if the demon dies and then I kill you, the hero of mankind, ....... I'd be Emperor and you'd be Nabal. And what do you think would happen if the Emperor killed Ragan Artorius, who came back from the dead, because that's exactly what would happen."

Don't be afraid to be overly gory.

I can't believe you're so blithely telling me that it's in your best interest to be annihilated like Lagan Artorius while I kill demons.

Of course, if I were a real warrior, I might be afraid of Bertus plunging his sword into my throat, but I am physically incapable of fighting a demon.

Bertus must kill Charlotte.

But if you kill it, you're doing something very dangerous.

"So, if you end up killing Charlotte, understand that it's unavoidable....... What. Is that what you're saying?"

At my words, Bertus shook his head.

"There's no way you're going to believe that."

As if to say otherwise, Bertus smiled wryly.

"I thought you said there was no reason?"

"...... did."

There's no reason to keep Charlotte alive.

So the entourage will argue that Charlotte must be killed to consolidate the imperial power, and Bertus has nothing to say against that.

"So, you need a rationale."

A reason, a rationale.

"An excuse for me not to kill my brother."

A reason for Bertus not to kill Charlotte if he becomes emperor. A reason for the entourage not to demand that Charlotte be killed.

Bertus stirs his teacup and smiles wickedly.

In the matter of Charlotte's soul, it comes back to politics.

A girl who must die no matter which way she goes.

Charlotte De Gradias.

"You want to save my brother's life, don't you?"

You brought Charlotte out of the darkness last time, and now you're going to bring her out of a political situation where she should be dead.

Bertus asks, and I nod falsely.

"Right."

"Somehow?"

"Somehow."

Bertus smirks.

"Marry my brother."

Detomorian's Prophecy.

"There's no other way."

It's only now that I realize that it was predicting this situation.

And.

I couldn't help but wonder what personal favor the Emperor was trying to ask me.

However, a question arose.

"Doesn't that strengthen Charlotte's claim to the imperial throne?"

Having said all that, Bertus has no reason to keep Charlotte alive.

She doesn't want to have me as an enemy, but marrying a holy man empowers Charlotte.

"I suppose."

Bertus must have some idea. He would never do anything good for Charlotte.

However, Bertus didn't tell us what he was thinking.

Or, really, are you feeling sympathy for Charlotte?

\* \* \*

Bertus was already convinced of victory, and he knew it wouldn't be until it was overturned.

And I know that.

Even if Bertus did not exist, it is unclear whether Charlotte would be able to become emperor. The people realize that Charlotte has become one with the demon's spirit, and unless she can fully control her dark powers, she will become the master of a sinister force.

That in and of itself, apart from all other matters, makes Charlotte unfit to be emperor.

Therefore, Bertus already does not recognize Charlotte as a competitor. However, if he kills Charlotte because he is urged to do so by his entourage, he will have an enemy.

That's what Bertus is saying.

I'm a little scared.

I am the master of Alsbringer and Tiamata.

If Charlotte were to marry me, my status would increase, but her safety would decrease.

If the fight against the devil becomes visible in the future, my presence is bound to be revealed.

The hero of mankind, the hope of mankind.

This shitty modifier will stick to me.

And if Charlotte becomes my wife, the empire cannot touch her, just as it cannot touch me. Whether Bertus becomes emperor or not, there will be no talk of killing Charlotte until I am dead.

I'm sure the Emperor knows that. So he stopped trying to ask me for a favor of that nature. He couldn't ask me to do something for personal reasons, because he had become too much of a force to be reckoned with.

I'm sure Charlotte knows this.

To save Charlotte, I must marry her. Now that Alsbringer is in my hands, my case is even stronger.

That's why Bertus has been talking. Because he doesn't know what he'll do if the guy with not one, but two holy relics turns up dead.

But shouldn't I be able to make that decision regardless of Charlotte's wishes?

What the heck is Bertus's intention.

-Ka-ching!

"What do you think?"

"....... No. Just."

"Hands."

Ellen helped me to my feet as I stumbled backwards.

What am I supposed to do?

I've promised myself so many times that I would protect Charlotte no matter what, and now I have to do it, and I can't save her if I don't.

Well, is that right.

Episode 389.

No matter what I did, I needed to talk to Charlotte.

Charlotte often returned to the palace to work on her research in the art of marriage. She watched to see who Alsbringer chose, congratulated me, and then returned to the palace.

Saturday night.

Access to the palace is now something I can do at any time.

But instead of standing at the main entrance to the Imperial Palace, I stood at the Warp Gate, holding the artifact Charlotte had given me.

Bertus already knows most of the facts and doesn't actually want to kill Charlotte.

Still, it doesn't change the fact that I need to watch my step. Even if it's not Bertu, Charlotte could get in trouble for going on record as saying I went to the Palace of Spring in the middle of the night on a weekend.

I planned to use the warp gate to the basement of the Palace of Spring that Charlotte had given me.

I activated the brooch-like artifact as Charlotte had instructed, and used priority to enter the warp gate.

I was able to walk straight through the warp gate.

An underground space that is dark, but not completely devoid of light.

An artifact that doesn't follow a set path, but rather interferes with it and can exit through a completely different gate.

Even though it was my first time using it, I realized that it was dangerous.

As you continue up the stairs from the basement of the Palace of Spring, you soon see a button on the wall that activates a secret door.

No. But.

This is something.......

Why do I feel like I've committed a crime when it's something I was given to use?

It was Charlotte who told me to come anytime, so I can come anytime.

You're not getting dressed, are you sleeping?

If you're going in while you're sleeping, that's kind of weird.

No, I mean, you had permission to do that, right? That's what you were told to do, and that's what you did, so what's the problem?

Think of it like coming home from a long night at work and your wife is still sleeping at home.

No, we're not a couple yet!

Not yet doesn't mean I'm going to do it!

I don't know.

-Dalcock

I pressed the button, and the wall gently opened without a sound, revealing a panoramic view of the interior of Charlotte's bedroom.

Luckily, it wasn't one of those situations where I was in the middle of getting dressed and Charlotte appeared out of nowhere.

However.

The bed was definitely smaller than the last time I was here.

He said it was too big and uncomfortable and that he would change it, and he did. Sure, it's still pretty big, but it's not like I have to crawl around in bed.

In such a bed.

I could see Charlotte sleeping peacefully in an upright position looking at the ceiling.

But it was a little different than usual.

His hair is dyed black.

As I got closer, I could see a little more detail.

The darkness doesn't drip and drip and drip like it did last time.

Charlotte, who looked like she'd dyed her hair black, was asleep, breathing evenly, with a calm demeanor.

The demon's ego has been blown away by my words, and all that remains is power.

It and Charlotte's soul are slowly merging, and now it's almost complete.

So Charlotte doesn't run away, and she doesn't break out in a cold sweat.

As if to show that the forces were united in a natural way, not in a seizure.

The power consumed Charlotte, but she remained peacefully asleep.

Charlotte will be fine, regardless of the spell. As long as she remains one with the demon.

Is this really a good thing.

I don't know.

"Charlotte."

I call Charlotte to be still.

Because if it's okay as it is, it won't be okay any other way.

"Charlotte, it's me."

"ugh......."

At the sound of someone calling, dark-haired Charlotte stirs, her brow narrowing.

"Hey."

Eventually, when I called her by her name, Charlotte narrowed her eyes and went still.

"Hmm....... Huh?"

Charlotte's eyes met mine.

No.

Come to think of it.

If you saw me in a room with the lights off, you'd think it was a creepy guy in the dark who broke into the room.

I watch Charlotte's eyes widen to tears.

"Gah....... Suck! Suck!"

"!"

I covered Charlotte's mouth in case she screamed.

The moment you blocked it.

While I question in my head how this is different from an irreparable offense.

I could see the fear in Charlotte's eyes as she didn't recognize me.

Speaking of which.

Charlotte had been kidnapped by Sarkegar.

Reason flew out of Charlotte's head in terror, and darkness began to flow from her hair.

Then, out of thin air, I could see dozens of dark spears appear, aimed at me.

-shii profit!

This.

Dies.

"It's me! It's me! Reinhardt!"

"!"

I could see the dozens of dark spears flying at me from all directions, stopping just short of turning me into a bundle of skewers.

It happened in less than a second, before I could stop her and explain anything.

Real.

It almost got ridiculous.

\* \* \*

"Sorry Reinhard......."

"No....... I can do that. I'm the one who came to you."

"I should have thought it could be you, but I was so surprised that......."

I apologized to the landlord for trespassing. She was so surprised that I had almost killed her that she apologized profusely without even checking on herself.

"I told you to come find me, and now you're doing this....... I'll be more careful in the future. I've never been here before, so I'm not sure if I'll be able to......."

"You should have told him I'm coming, too, so he can be surprised. He's not hurt."

"I told you to come whenever you want....... Hmm. Hmm. Okay......?"

Charlotte's eyes widened as if she'd just checked on her.

"What......?"

"Yeah, you should be more concerned about your health than mine."

Running a hand through her hair, Charlotte realized that her locks had been stained black, and she panicked and stood in front of the full-length mirror in her bedroom.

Only Saka has black hair, and his eyes are no longer the usual golden color, but black.

Charlotte's fingertips trembled. She would be crushed by the horror of knowing she was being consumed by this power again.

"And....... And......."

"Relax, Charlotte, you'll be fine."

I know now that when Charlotte is in this state, it's only psychological.

I put my arm around her shoulders and Charlotte buried her face in my arms, averting her gaze from the mirror.

"No one's controlling your consciousness like they did last time, it's just something that happens sometimes, and nothing's really going to happen, trust me."

"Yes....... Yes."

While cosmetic changes may raise doubts in others, they can also be controlled in some way.

Charlotte shivered and broke out in a cold sweat for a very long time, as if the very idea of change was frightening, even if she knew it wasn't.

After a while of soothing, Charlotte stopped shaking.

But the gray hairs didn't come back.

Charlotte muttered to herself as she looked at the beautiful, blackened locks of hair in her hands.

"I feel....... so weird."

It must have been eerie to have something dominate your consciousness, but once you calm down, you won't actually feel any threat.

It may have been a crisis reaction, but Charlotte even used her powers to attack me. Charlotte seemed to instinctively know how to handle the demon's power.

"Um, is there something urgent?"

Charlotte dropped the hand that had been running through her hair and looked at me, wondering if she was more curious about my reason for coming here in the middle of the night than she was about her own problems.

Where and how to start with what to say.

I've been told by Bertus that unless I marry you, you are bound to die.

I wonder what Charlotte's face would look like if she heard that.

Maybe he's tired of being pitied by Bertus.

"Let's say you're feeling better."

I didn't start with that right away. Charlotte nodded at my words.

"Yeah. I hope so."

"So, does that solve all your problems?"

"......."

Charlotte's expression quickly darkened.

"So, nothing happens from now on. I can stay safe?"

My answer to that question.

Charlotte didn't have any answers.

\* \* \*

Charlotte was in no condition to devote her full attention to the issue of imperial succession.

First, I was focused on finding Valerie, and second, I was busy taking care of myself because I didn't know when I would be consumed by the demonic spirit.

The distance had widened too much, and Bertus had taken too much credit. The things he had to do to survive ended up becoming the name of the heir to the imperial throne who did nothing.

It was an act of God.

It's just that force majeure doesn't give Charlotte extra points.

"Dear Bertus, did you hear something?"

"......."

I couldn't say no.

"Maybe it was meant to be this way, ever since I came back from the Devil Castle."

Even if she hadn't wasted her time searching for Valerie, Charlotte would have never gotten over the after-effects of the demonic procedure.

It's just the way it is.

"It's true that my position has become very unstable, because the people who supported me are now looking at Bertus and not me."

They can't stick with Bertus, but now that Charlotte's defeat is certain, they look to Bertus, not Charlotte.

The Palace of Spring has been closed for unexplained reasons before, so even her entourage has a general idea that something is very wrong with Charlotte.

It's hard to trust an unstable lord when you're just trying to live a normal life.

Above all, the centrists would have seen Charlotte's situation and been all over Bertus, who was likely to be the next emperor.

"If Bertus becomes emperor, it might not be his minions who kill me, but my own people, who might try to buy immunity with my life."

Bertus's entourage doesn't have to tell him to kill Charlotte.

There could be infighting among Charlotte's factions and they could kill her. In that case, it would not be Bertus who kills Charlotte, so Bertus would say that he did not cause her harm.

While Bertus and Charlotte's relationship hasn't mended, it's clear that Bertus' animosity toward Charlotte has softened enough that he's willing to be merciful since he's already won.

"I don't know, if I can just fix my situation, maybe I'll be okay for as long as I'm in Temple."

Charlotte smiles at me.

"Do you remember what the Emperor said, that if anything were to happen to either of us, he would disqualify the other from succeeding to the throne?"

"......Yes."

During my freshman year, the Emperor sent an edict to the Temple Royal class that apparently said just that.

"So, we're good for at least a couple years."

At least five years by the time you graduate from Temple, that is, unless something happens to the Emperor by then. And even then, the words themselves may become obsolete over time.

"And maybe things will change in those years......."

Charlotte trailed off as she said that. If Charlotte accomplishes something in the meantime, things might change.

That's true in and of itself.

But even Charlotte's supporters have already realized the consequences and are turning away. The sooner you turn around, the sooner you'll be safe from the next emperor's eyes.

Once you lose your foundation, you're done for. There are no second chances.

So, Charlotte's statement is just an excuse.

An excuse to reassure me.

Bertus's people won't harm Charlotte, but if Charlotte's entourage is up to no good, that's something they can't handle.

There's a very good chance that you'll be fine for a few years and then it won't be true.

I may not make it out of Temple unscathed.

At least for a few years, I'll be free of the demon's spirit.

Charlotte is lying to me.

"Reinhardt."

"......."

"It wasn't supposed to be a life."

Charlotte looks at me and says.

"If I could live with myself, even if it was just being taken advantage of, if I could live like that for a few years......."

Charlotte looks at me and smiles sadly.

"That's good enough for me."

Beyond the timeout and eventually the timeout.

It's better to have a reprieve from the next one, even if it's only a reprieve from the next one, and that's enough to make you happy.

Charlotte became discouraged.

I was tired of it.

An empire is something, an imperial family is something, an emperor is something.

Even if Bertus had no desire to kill her, Charlotte would still have to die. It was very likely that Charlotte would die even if Bertus did nothing at all.

Because they were born with the potential for great power, they also had the penalty of death if they didn't achieve it.

Mercy is weakness and cannot be tolerated.

Charlotte squeezed my hand, still.

"Reinhardt."

He stares at me with sad eyes.

"You've already sacrificed so much for me, you've given me so much for nothing, and I'll never be able to repay you for what you've given me."

Charlotte brushes the back of my hand.

"I don't know what you're thinking, but I don't want you to sacrifice anything for me anymore."

Charlotte couldn't help but realize that I had something on my mind, which was why I had stormed into her bedroom in the middle of the night.

"I'm asking you as your friend."

I was desperate for him to think of me as more than a friend.

Charlotte finally used the word, friend.

\* \* \*

Charlotte stopped me from saying anything.

It was as if he no longer wanted me to make sacrifices for him.

Charlotte was losing her image power. She would become increasingly isolated politically, and there would be less and less she could do.

But Charlotte doesn't want me to make any more sacrifices for her.

It is not known that I have become Lord of Alsbringer, and it would make little difference if I were to marry Charlotte in that situation. If I were to do so, it would have to be known that I am also Lord of Tiamata and Alsbringer.

In order to save Charlotte's life, I also feel the pressure to make my name known to the public.

I sat still in the chair at Charlotte's bedside, unable to leave her bedroom.

In the darkness, Charlotte lay in bed, staring blankly up at the ceiling. With her eyes closed and a few deep breaths, Charlotte's black-haired body returned to normal.

I felt like I had almost gotten used to controlling the power.

"If it's already done, I wonder if I should give up my power. It's a powerful thing."

If you're losing support, you might as well leave it behind, even if it's an evil and destabilizing force. Charlotte seemed to be coming to that conclusion.

"......Maybe."

Charlotte smiled sadly at my words.

Charlotte's current situation is one in which she is increasingly forced to rely on the very power that nearly destroyed her.

If I had been the intruder, Charlotte would have been able to use her demonic powers to kill the intruder and survive on her own.

Rather, once freed from the demonic spirit, they are unable to make even the last stand of self-defense.

Charlotte knows it, and I know it.

So even though Charlotte knew it was me who had actually broken into her room, she seemed to realize that if she were to encounter a real intruder or assassin, her only recourse would be this cursed power that the devil had placed in her.

"Nothing is going the way I thought it would."

Charlotte smiles wryly and turns to look at me.

Life must have been hell for Charlotte ever since she was kidnapped by the Demon King. She searched for Valier, but was never reunited with him, and eventually realized that he was the Demon King's heir.

The race to the throne was ultimately lost.

He had hoped to rid himself of the demonic spirit in his body, but now he might have to rely on it.

"Charlotte......."

"Still, you know what?"

Charlotte held my hand still.

"There's at least one good thing that happened that didn't go as planned."

Charlotte pulled my hand into hers, hugging it to her chest as if it were her own.

"Being close to you."

An A-list bad-tempered bully and heir to a criminal organization.

And here we were, Charlotte and I, both thought to be human trash, in the middle of the night in a bedroom at the Palace of Spring.

That's not what Charlotte expected, and it's not what I expected.

This is another one of those things that didn't work out as expected.

"I, I'm very grateful for that."

Although it didn't all work out as I thought it would.

Charlotte didn't seem to think she had failed at everything.

There's only one way to save Charlotte.

She might have a few years' reprieve, but it's entirely possible that a renegade member of Charlotte's entourage could be out to get her tomorrow.

It could be actual harm, or it could be poison.

You might lose that smile.

A sad smile, but a smile that will be lost.

Losing Charlotte forever.

I can't stand it.

"Well, let's do this."

"Huh? What?"

I bring my hand to Charlotte's cheek.

"A marriage by halves."

"Huh? Half a marriage, what does that mean?"

I knew this decision would change so many things.

"We'll just get engaged."

"Huh?"

I could never lose what I had somehow managed to keep.

Episode 390.

Let's get engaged, not necessarily married, just to give Charlotte a temporary excuse.

Not out of fear of Bertus' forces, but to prevent Charlotte's entourage from being converted.

I said it with the urgency of putting out a fire. Charlotte looked up at me from where she lay, biting her lip.

"What the hell....... Why are you doing this?"

Charlotte puts her hand on my cheek, just as I do.

Charlotte's slightly chilled body heat transferred to my cheeks.

"I, the one you have to do this for....... You're not....... You're not me......."

"It's important."

"......."

"You matter."

A million emotions and thoughts were swirling through my head, but all I could say was this.

"That should do it."

This is a bad choice.

This choice makes no one happy, and only ensures someone's survival. That's it.

So, is it right to let Charlotte die?

I don't want to see that, so I'm not sure I'm right in this situation where I'm just choosing the next best thing instead of the worst thing.

Charlotte finally turns to look at me as I say this, her face contorted, her eyes tightly closed, and she begins to tear up.

"Reinhardt....... So, so....... Thanks......."

Eventually, Charlotte freaked out.

"So....... sad......."

I felt sad because I knew I was making this choice to protect Charlotte, not because I loved her.

\* \* \*

Since I couldn't spend the night in the Spring Palace, I returned to the Temple once more. Through the warp gate in the basement of the Spring Palace, of course.

It's not official, but Charlotte and I are engaged.

I don't know how or in what way, but it was a promise I made to Charlotte.

With only wrong answers everywhere, I felt like I had chosen the next best answer.

I was engaged to be married, so I couldn't make this decision on my own.

I need to create a rationale for how I can be nominated as an imperial sire when outwardly I'm just a student in the Temple Royal class.

Soon.

It needs to be known that I'm the owner of Alsbringer, so just because I decided to do it doesn't mean it's going to happen right away.

Therefore, I had to meet with the most important person.

"Engaged....... ."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

It's a pretty tame situation.

He's just a commoner who asks the emperor for a private audience and tells him he'll betroth him to the princess.

But the truth is, the emperor was going to ask me for this favor first, but I said the words he didn't get to say.

Engaged, not married.

The Emperor stood in front of me, eyes closed, contemplating the gap.

"Can you afford it?"

I didn't ask them what they could afford.

But that word "afford" was too much.

It's a direct request from Bertus, but it's probably a question of whether you can afford Bertus.

If it becomes public knowledge that you are the master of Alsbringer, you may attract the attention of the Demon King.

And the tangled and ruined relationships with other people.

I risked my life the first time for Charlotte, and I risked my life the second time.

This time, I have to put everything on the line.

Lives and all.

They feel like they mean the same thing, but they actually mean something completely different to me.

Even Charlotte was rather saddened by my decision, not pleased. She seemed to be miserable with her situation.

"Yes, I can afford it."

It was complicated, but the answer was simple.

I will protect Charlotte. The one I saved the first time, this time, I'll keep it all to myself.

"Thank you....... Reinhardt."

A second thank you to the emperor.

It would be a glorious moment, but it didn't feel that glorious.

\* \* \*

I spoke with the Emperor about my engagement.

I'm still just a student to the outside world, and if word of my engagement to Charlotte got out, it would be a grotesque scandal: a commoner betrothed to an empress.

It's only right that Susie is the new owner of Alsbringer.

We don't know exactly how we're going to do this, but we need to do it before Charlotte is in more danger than she already is. Once Charlotte had her powers under control, she would be safe from physical attack.

And.

I didn't know how to explain this to my kids.

They won't understand.

I don't expect to be understood.

I just couldn't figure out how to explain it, so I was stuck.

Only me, the Emperor, and Charlotte know about this yet.

And then there's Bertus, who even suggested it.

The week after the weekend.

Saviolin Tana called out to me and Ellen.

"As of this moment, I am in charge of both of your major classes."

Ellen and I had our entire major classes replaced.

We both expected it to some extent.

Though our major classes have already been replaced by combat training, our real training should be in the use of holy objects. I even have an Alsbringer.

The interim governess, Saviolin Tana, ended up being the interim teacher. Only to teach the two of us.

"Someone else will organize your class while I'm away."

"Yes."

"Yes."

I've also wondered if Tana's seeming drift away from her role as Charlotte's bodyguard might be due to her being pushed out of the succession race, but I'm not sure.

The dormitory dance floor wasn't the place to learn from Saviolin Tana.

"You've been granted permission to use the facility, which is normally off-limits. I'll register you for access to the facility, and you can come here to train on your own."

Saviolin Tana took us to the Temple's high-level combat training grounds.

It's a place like that.

A combat training arena with the same system as the main stadium in the Temple Tournament. A training ground where recall artifacts are triggered when players are on the verge of being fatally wounded despite fighting at full strength.

It's a very expensive place to build and maintain, so it's not for everyone. In fact, they don't even have royalty classes here.

Unlike the main stadium, which was outdoors, we entered the training grounds wearing our artifacts as a safety measure.

Ellen summoned Ramen, and I summoned Alsbringer and Tiamata.

"......."

Saviolin Tana looked at me and said, "Hmmm.

I summoned them both anyway.

b.

Am I supposed to be practicing dual wielding or something?

"......That's a headache."

"I think so, too."

"Sure."

Ellen nodded in agreement.

"You wouldn't be the first...... to have two holy relics in your life and wonder if you should use them both or just one, but I'm not sure if you should call it a blessing or a curse......."

Tana glanced at Ellen and corrected herself when she remembered the case of Ragan Artorius.

Saviolin Tana wasn't sure if she should start practicing the bizarre art of dual wielding, or if she should use choice and focus, swapping holy items as needed.

"Your doctor must be important, what are you going to do?"

Tiamata and Alsbringer.

Both are very powerful artifacts.

Saviolin Tana for dual wielding seemed to be very negative. I want to use both, but I don't want to throw away everything I've ever done and learn from scratch.

Isn't the point of dual wielding that you lose the freedom of your left hand, rather than having one more way to attack?

How can I not put this together?

I'm going to rename it Alstiamata or something, so we can merge.

Naturally, none of that happened.

I sent Tiamata back.

"I'll take one, and if you try to force me to use both, neither you nor I will."

"Wise decision, Reinhard."

If you try to change your body just to use what you have, you'll ruin what you've built.

For now, you'll want to get a feel for Alsbringer's basic abilities.

\* \* \*

I haven't set them all up, but Relics have two powers by default.

Basic and true abilities.

In the case of Tiamata, she is essentially a very powerful demonic force. Her true power is the ability to wield vast amounts of divine power at will. Though there are some special circumstances, such as Olivia's help.

In the case of laments, it has a similar effect to auror blades, and I don't know what the true effect is yet.

In the case of Rafelt, we saw something similar to Auror Armor last time, and again, we don't know his true abilities.

And Alsbringer.

True power is summoning a war god.

-Quack!

"Ahem!"

Ellen took a half step back as the ramen crashed into my swung Alsbringer.

This was despite the fact that there was still a significant power differential between me and Ellen.

-Kang! Kaang!

After a few more swipes, Ellen backed off.

Alsbringer's true power is his avatar's ability to summon war gods, but that's not the only reason he exists.

The basic effect of Alsbringer is simple.

If the enemy is stronger than you, the stronger you are.

The more enemies I have to deal with, the better.

Makes the owner stronger.

It had a powerful basic effect that truly lived up to its name, Sword of the War God.

Of course, this is just a setup to make it easier for the protagonist to overcome a stronger opponent.

The Alsbringer that Ludwig used for such a setup is now in my hands.

Of course.

As with any such setup, it's not invincible.

Makes the owner stronger.

After all, that vague phrase says it makes you stronger, not that it will necessarily let you win against someone stronger than you.

You said that the stronger your enemy is than you, the stronger you are, and the more you are, the stronger you are, but where did you say that it gives you victory?

Sure, it might let you win, but chances are it won't.

It's a very powerful artifact, but ultimately a vague one.

Because ambiguity is good for writing.

-Carded!

Ellen's ramen deflects my sword roughly, but at just the right angle to pierce my throat.

-pot!

And with that, I was recalled outside the training grounds.

In the real world, no amount of magical enhancements would have saved him from being decapitated.

Ellen is much stronger than I am.

So even though Alsbringer made me as strong as I was, I was still no match for him.

Undefeated in 10 games.

"Ha ha....... Ha ha......."

I was almost as bad outside of the training center.

Exhaustion.

In real life, I would have died ten times to Ellen.

"I can definitely feel the power of the artifact. On average, I lasted at least fifteen sums longer than usual."

Saviolin Tana, who had watched the whole thing from outside the training center, nodded in agreement. It was a rout, as usual, but she'd been pushing Ellen harder and harder.

Back in the waiting room, Ellen was so sweaty that her hair was sticking to her forehead.

"It's hard."

It was such an intense 10 games that Ellen said that.

"What about me, who even lost?"

Ellen didn't even use a rappel. This means that in real life, she would have been no match at all.

Is there any way to use both Alsbringer and Tiamata at the same time, like in a scabbard or something, so that if you're fighting with one on your belt or back, you can use both buffs?

"Reinhardt, you often encounter situations that increase your physical abilities, including your enhanced superpowers, so you don't always know exactly how much athleticism you have. You often find yourself in situations where you're almost forced to push, and you tend to panic when you're pushed back. You have to get used to how strong you are in certain situations."

When Ellen and I were both exhausted, we sat on the bench next to each other and listened to Tana's feedback.

"Ellen, I can't fault you."

"Thank you."

No.

I'm the only one who hears the feedback.

No more favoritism from Saviolin Tana.

Tana wasn't disappointed in me.

"Should I say something to Ellen, too? If I say something to Reinhardt, it'll be too.......

"Reinhardt, I can't deliberately tell Ellen to stop being a dick.

"What do I do?

"I want to compliment you.

You want to play favorites, but you can't.

That's just on a superficial level, and I've even written a self-reinforcing relic into a cheat called Superpower.

Ellen also wields laments, but with the unbreakable sword of Alsbringer in her hand, sharpness isn't much of an advantage. If you're an auror blade wielder like Tana, who can generate energy pulses from the blade itself, that's a different story.

Ellen's basically just taking a raw physical, armed with all sorts of cheats, and pressing it.

Still.

"Ha ha....... Ha ha......."

You realize that Ellen is sweating and breathing heavily.

Something.

I felt like I was following along.

No matter how fast you are.

And every time I saw Ellen, there was a nagging feeling of discomfort.

Some kind of discomfort, I should say guilt.

Episode 391.

We were treated like special students in a royal class.

I'm not supposed to take my major classes on the days I have major classes, but I canceled all of my other classes and spent the entire day getting combat training from Saviolin Tana. I wasn't in a position to discuss credits, but I was told that they would take care of that.

Ellen and I played against each other, but we also ended up playing against Saviolin Tana.

Alsbringer definitely boosted my performance, especially against Savior Tana.

That doesn't make you a Swordmaster, though.

I really like the idea of Alsbringer's basic ability: the stronger your opponent is, the stronger you are.

They've stolen the cheat for the main character.

And the problem Tana pointed out.

Against Saviolin Tana, I often found myself in a situation where my physical abilities increased so drastically that I lost control of my stride, which was problematic because it made me stronger.

"Ugh!"

"Watch out!"

-Bam!

"Kek!"

She grabbed me by the scruff of the neck and pulled me back into proper position as I was about to do nothing and twist myself into a bad position.

I even tried to see if I could win against Ellen in the same state I was in against Savior Tana, but it was pointless.

It's pretty clear that you're going to lose worse than you did before.

I stared at the Alsbringer in my right hand.

"......."

"Don't feel sorry for yourself. It's natural to be unfamiliar with things you've never used before."

You have to get used to being pushed beyond your level of physical ability.

The stronger the opponent, the stronger you are, which is a very powerful but overly ambiguous buff, so it's important to be aware of your physical abilities and adjust accordingly.

It's a powerful force, but if you can't control it, you might be better off not using Alsbringer.

"Let's try again."

"Yes."

I don't know if I'll ever need to unleash the true power of Alsbringer.

However, Alsbringer is already a very powerful artifact in its own right.

I have to get used to this power.

\* \* \*

Saviolin Tana trained us in many ways.

My duel with Ellen.

And then you're going one-on-one with Ellen and me.

After feedback time, we taught karate.

I've never beaten Ellen, and of course I've never beaten Saviorin Tana, and the same goes for pincer.

But Tana, who says she's not used to teaching, is by no means incapable of it.

That wasn't all.

"Let's talk about what to do when you're stranded in the field."

She taught us how to not just fight in combat, but how to survive in combat, such as how to survive a firefight and how to survive when isolated in enemy territory.

This would have been the same thing taught in the Temple Combat Major class, now renamed Combat Training.

Of course, that's not her role. It's just that this whole situation where Ellen and I are being educated by her is a classified secret, and Saviolin Tana is playing the role of teacher from start to finish.

I learned how to infiltrate enemy lines, how to bypass magical bindings, and how to behave in uncharted territory.

The two of us learned about things like surviving alone as opposed to operating with someone, or assassinating a factor.

That's what being a warrior is all about.

An assassin who infiltrates an enemy camp and decapitates their leader.

In reality, what Lagan Artorius did was not so different from that, which is why Saviolin Tana was teaching us to be assassins, not soldiers.

"Of course, it's also possible that the demon is lurking in the Human Continent instead of the Darklands, and even if we find him, he could escape via teleportation. We'll teach you what to do in that case, as well as how to start a war."

From how to spot hidden enemies in a human city to fighting in the streets, Savior Tana seemed to have a lot to teach us.

You're not just learning swordsmanship.

But, somehow.

When you learn how to hunt, you naturally learn how to run.

Soon, I was learning how to run away, not how to hunt.

\* \* \*

Where eternal winter reigns.

Vampire Council.

"Antirrhinus, how's it going?"

"It's a very high-level spell, so it's going to take some time to design, but the Order's mages are very good, so it shouldn't take too long."

In response to Eleris' question, Antirrhinus said.

The construction of the dungeons and labyrinths of the Darklands was well underway. The grimoire, Quantum Maze, was of great interest to the Black Order as well as to Antrianus; it was perfect for the current situation and purpose.

"That's interesting, how did you get such a powerful grimoire?"

"I'm afraid I can't answer that."

"Hehe, you don't trust me that much."

Eleris sighed heavily at Antrian's dismissive attitude. There was no way she was going to share the location of the demon castle's underground libraries with someone who was likely to rush there as soon as he learned of them, and she had no say in the matter.

In recent times, the Vampire Council has met frequently. These meetings, which occurred once every few years or even decades, were due to the council's working relationship with the Demon King.

"How did Lucinil get into Temple?"

"Yes."

Lucinil smiled and nodded at Lerouen's question. Lucinil left the Temple after class and teleported straight to the council meeting.

"Even if it's necessary, isn't it inconvenient? It must be a pain."

"What's the big deal, I'm surrounded by cute kids?"

"You know ......, Lucinil? Sometimes I don't understand Lucinil more than I understand Antirrhinus."

"I pity your dry sensibilities that don't recognize cute as cute."

"Don't say it."

Lucinil is as much of a dilettante as Antirrhinus when it comes to traveling. He was admitted to the Temple by agreement, of course, with the understanding that he would need close protection, but when it was suggested that it was necessary, Lucinil seemed delighted.

"Anyway, let's not forget the original purpose of security."

"You're on your own, you monster."

"A monster that comes out of a flask when you shake it a few times. That's ridiculous."

"Uh, that....... That, that's a really hurtful thing to say, isn't it......?"

"You're the first one to call me a monster."

"Well, I did....... I'm sorry......."

Galarsh crossed his arms as Lucinil sulked.

"I was harsh with my words. I apologize."

You live so long that you learn to apologize quickly when you can't be bothered to argue with each other. Galarsh looked at Lucinil, his large teeth clicking together as the atmosphere subtly stiffened.

"Okay, so you're on close protection, so you're familiar with the current situation. Are there any particular threats or problems? We're holding hands for now, but we don't know what the Black Order might be up to behind the scenes......."

"Ah, yes! Alsbringer!"

Lucinil suddenly turned bright red and jumped to her feet, as if her sullen demeanor had been forgotten.

"Our Archdemon! We were chosen by Alsbringer!"

He looked like a mom who'd just gotten her kid a job somewhere nice.

\* \* \*

Naturally, there was a momentary panic in the council. Even Antirrhinus panicked.

Tiamata, and Alsbringer.

Valier held two holy relics.

Eleris, in particular, listened with wide eyes.

Eleris had told Valerie that Alsbringer's master would be Ludwig.

It would either mean they were wrong, or the future had changed.

Or hump.

It's also possible that Valerie was lying.

"That guy, no matter what he does, he's going to do one big thing, and it's gotten to the point where it's weird not to."

The choice of two holy objects is consistent with the will of the gods. However, these are the ones who know the truth about the gods and demons. Humans believe that the gods choose for humans, but this is not the case.

The will of the gods, if it exists, chose Valier.

"Maybe the gods are finally siding with the demons."

Lerouen said, smiling faintly. It was a smile that said so, but seemed to be of little interest to humans or demons alike.

The holy objects have been on the side of the humans for so long, maybe they're siding with the demons now.

Galarsh crosses his meaty arms and mutters.

"I don't believe in the will of the gods. But having two holy relics....... like there's some kind of great current, and the Devil can't help but be a major player in it."

Eleris stared at the table, unable to keep the sadness out of her eyes.

"In a way, the thing that killed the father is now in the hands of the son."

Antirrhinus said, smiling in amusement.

"So, so to speak....... I guess?"

Rusinil looked dumbfounded, as if that perspective hadn't occurred to him.

"I don't know, you looked a little peeved."

Lucinil recalled the look on Reinhardt's face when the Alsbringer was given to him.

I thought, "Why would he do that to me when I can't even like him," but then I realized that's what he was supposed to do, and Lucinil understood.

Eleris stared down at the table, her expression grim.

'Alsbringer has....... degraded.......'

Elise stays still, watching the blizzard rage against the windows beyond the conference room.

We don't know if they were wrong about the future or if they were lying in the first place.

Bali is getting stronger.

Are you strong because there are things coming up that you need to get through with that strength.

I wonder if getting stronger brings with it things that you have to overcome.

Eleris couldn't tell.

\* \* \*

"You mean special activities?"

Ms. Sarvina sighed when she saw Olivia's extracurricular application.

"Yes, sir."

"Olivia, it's true that extra-curricular activities count towards your senior year, but you've already had a year off, and you're aiming to graduate this year......."

"There's not much more to learn."

Olivia Ranze wasn't wrong: she'd given up on her major altogether and switched to swordsmanship to graduate. But since neither her divine powers nor her swordsmanship could compare to those of the other graduates, the classes were, to put it mildly, a waste of time.

So you've decided that it's good to get experience outside of the temple that you can't get inside of it, and that's not arrogant, it's just plain right.

"Sometimes the class will be excused, but if it goes too long, like last time, I may be forced to pay for it."

Ms. Sarvina's comment made Olivia smile.

"That's good."

Ms. Sarvina couldn't understand the words, but she couldn't seem to break Olivia's resolve.

But Ms. Sarvina shook her head when she saw what Olivia had written on the extracurricular activity sheet and where they were going.

"Yeah. It's not that dangerous here, and there's a team of investigators from the Empire here, so it shouldn't be too bad....... Why on earth would you want to go here?"

The corner of Olivia's mouth twitched upward.

"I want to find a trail of demons."

Olivia's destination.

Raziern, the capital of Levaina.

Not long ago, it was the site of a demonic attack.

Episode 392.

Since my major class was replaced, I have been training to familiarize myself with the power of the Alsbringer. It is known within the Royal Class that I am the master of the Alsbringer, so I have been able to bring it out at will in the performance hall.

Of course, the Alsbringer is such a sharp blade that it actually splits flesh and bone upon contact, so it was agreed that it would only be used in high-level combat training centers, not in practice. In the first place, the opponent would have to use a training sword, which would likely shatter or slice the sword itself upon contact with the Alsbringer.

Sure, I was busy training, but I also took regular classes and definitely had time to spare.

I thought about ways to make a name for myself on the continent as the master of Alsbringer, but I hadn't come up with anything yet. Charlotte was still doing fine.

But every time she looked at me, she looked like she was going to cry.

At the same time as she was thanking me, she was also feeling very sorry for me.

"Why do you eat so well?"

I was walking down Main Street with Lucinil, staring blankly at her as she munched on a crepe.

It was just the two of them now. I'd only taken her out because she was whining to go for a walk.

But eating is out of the question, because Elise said she could eat.

But why is he eating it?

"Don't you know I am something special, Reinhardt?"

"What is that?"

"I'm not a normal vampire, I'm a homunculus, and my body type is obviously different from humans, and I'm not a normal vampire."

"Can you say it a little smaller?"

"I'm noise-canceling in real time, so it's okay. Anyway, that's why I can manipulate my physical body with magic, don't you see how easily I got through the Temple Gate? That's why I can taste things, it's just that it's not my lifeblood."

Lucinil is not your typical vampire in many ways. She's a homunculus, a creature that never existed in the first place, turned into a vampire.

In some ways, Lucinil, the homunculus vampire, seemed to be functioning more fully as a living being than the other vampires.

"By the way, are you a bit reluctant about having an Alsbringer or something?"

"It's a cautionary tale to use whatever you can."

"Hmmm. I guess so. Since you said you don't remember."

Lucinil was worried that the object that killed the demon had fallen into my hands.

"Yuck, that's sluggish. I think I'm going to throw up."

Lucinil ate her crepe for a while, then suddenly scurried to the nearest public restroom.

No.

Why does he seem to be eating so well?

The more I got to know him, the more I realized he was an oddball.

A few moments later, Lucinil walked over to me, wiping the corner of her mouth in disbelief.

"If you're going to eat well, eat well. What are you doing?"

"You should eat what you want, even if you know you'll throw up. He's good at keeping a straight face in front of other kids, so don't worry about it."

You sound like an alcoholic's excuse for this.

"Anyway, I've shared with the council that you've been chosen by Alsbringer, and the dungeon renovation seems to be going well."

I didn't bring it up for nothing, I brought it up to share what's going on.

"By the way, those Hufflepuffs were kind of weird."

"Weird?"

"You guys built that thing, that ridiculous thing."

Power Cartridge and Moonshine.

Rusinil seemed to know about it.

"You built two things that I can't figure out if you asked me to build them right now, and you built them in a matter of months, and they don't seem to have any flaws in the research?"

I thought it would be just a bunch of kids, since the royal class is so great, but when I saw the results, I think it made Lucinil think it didn't make sense.

Two high school club-level creations that would make even a Lord Vampire, aka Archmage, who has spent years studying magic, cringe.

Of course, Adelia and Christina's talents are unorthodox, and indeed, even in Royal Class, our grade is overrepresented.

I don't know how she came across the research, but it seemed to really sink in that the Magical Research Society wasn't just a place for kids to get together and discuss magic.

"It's not that I don't understand your desire to keep it a secret, but....... but it's kind of a waste."

For fear of getting caught by Cantus Magna or getting in trouble with the kids, he decided to hide his accomplishments.

I hadn't gotten to the part about keeping it a secret from new club members, but I was reminded of the need to make sure they were properly initiated.

"And then there's him, the cutie."

"You mean Harriet, right?"

"Yeah, he's the weirdest in terms of nonsense. He's reinterpreting scroll magic as rune magic, and he's doing what, no, why?"

Apparently, while talking to the Magical Researchers, he also heard about the new magic system that Herriot had developed.

"I'm starting to wonder what the hell I've been doing with my life? There are kids who aren't even twenty yet doing that....... Maybe I'm not actually talented, so to speak....... pushed by time....... or something?"

Lucinil began to mutter something self-deprecating. Anyway, Lucinil was tongue-in-cheek, saying that the genius of the Society was amazing, and that Herriot de Saint-Ouen's talent was the most intriguing of all.

You say you're doing it for protection, but you're running around, sucking up, hanging out with the kids, it's just selfish.

"If I were Cantus Magna, I'd covet them more than a few spellbooks."

"......I think so too."

"It doesn't seem to have occurred to you that you could use them to get to Cantus Magna."

"......."

I've hidden the results of my research, and Lucinil has a real-time view of how I'm actually doing at the Temple.

They know I'm not going to try to take advantage of them.

"World peace."

Lucinil says, stretching like she's about to be torn apart.

"Reinhardt, anybody who dreams of such things should be disfellowshipped."

"You don't have to do that."

"Well, at least that's a positive."

Lucinil stretches out, sighs heavily, and looks up at me.

The look in his eyes was serious, unlike his usual playfulness.

"It might be a good idea to walk away before you build up too much emotion."

Running away before you can get closer to others.

Disappearing.

I could see what Rusinil meant when he said that it might actually be okay.

Before too much emotion builds up.

"I think it's too late for that."

By the time I did, it was too late.

At my self-help words, Rusinil gave me a wistful smile.

"...... looks like that."

He adds.

\* \* \*

Newly added to the list of out-of-grade people frequenting the sophomore A-class dorms is Lucinil, now a freshman.

"Where's my brother?"

"Ah....... Isn't your brother Reinhardt in the training grounds......?"

"Oh, yes, thank you, sir!"

Lucinil gave Heinrich a quick nod and hurried off to the rehearsal hall.

For some reason, Reinhardt had a crush on a silver-haired freshman as soon as the school year started.

There's a junior named Lucinil who calls all the other seniors "seniors" and follows Reinhardt around, calling him "my brother.

Reinhardt even seems to be annoyed by it.

So everyone was rekindling old animosities.

But of course, it can't be physically manifested.

He has been chosen by Alsbringer, who is now firmly under the Emperor's command.

Or the attention of a cute junior.

So does Alsbringer.

Why does he get to keep everything!

They were on the verge of cursing the world for being so unfair.

And just like that, Lucinil is wandering around her sophomore dorm room.

"Oh, hello. Senior."

"Uh, that....... Uhm. That, yeah."

Bertus ran into Lucinil in the hallway of the dormitory and returned her greeting with a shaky smile.

Silver Hair.

It's a kind of PTSD for Bertus.

So Bertus, who always wore a mask when dealing with people, couldn't hide his discomfort whenever he saw Lucinil.

This isn't Lucinyl, who wouldn't recognize such a sign.

"Do you hate me?"

"Huh? Oh, no, there's no reason for that."

"Then why do you always look at me and can't make eye contact?"

"Oh....... Did I do that? Um, not at all. I don't know."

Bertus pursed his lips as he watched Lucinil look up at him with an innocent expression, unable to bring himself to say that he was allergic to silver hair.

Bertus has had a lot on his mind lately, and hasn't been paying much attention to the Temple's affairs. As a result, he often spends his days in the Winter Palace and is not aware of the happenings in the dormitories.

All we know is that Reinhardt has been under a lot of stress lately because of what happened with Charlotte.

Freshman junior.

Silver-haired girl.

I'm always looking for Reinhardt.

I don't know how he did it, but it's clear that he's already managed to seduce a first-year student. At least in Bertus' eyes.

Reinhardt, who turned a silver-haired girl into a do-or-die guy before the semester started.

Why?

For what?

Bertus's head is spinning.

Apostle of Tuan.

Chosen warrior of Alsbringer.

Soon to be engaged to Charlotte, he is an imperial sire-to-be.

She's a cross-dressing contest winner.

Silver hair fetish.

Reinhardt.

Without realizing it, Bertus grabbed the shoulder of the silver-haired junior who was shaking his head.

"Beware of Reinhardt."

"What? That....... What?"

"Anyway, if you say be careful, be careful!"

Bertus said, glaring at Lucinil, who was suddenly frozen.

"That, that....... Will you......?"

Rusinil was puzzled, but nodded her head in agreement.

\* \* \*

For now, the most important thing to do is to fish for Kantus Magna in the dungeon we've created with the Black Order in Darklands.

And on a more personal note, how the hell am I going to proceed with my engagement to Charlotte, and how am I going to explain it to the kids? My guess is that if the Emperor's people contact me, I'll just do it, but they haven't sought me out yet.

The Magical Research Society's research is sealed after it's accomplished, but that doesn't mean it's disbanded. Everyone seemed to have ideas for new, but not too risky, research projects.

Even if he didn't, Louis Ankton seemed to be improving his own skills as he shared the results of his magical research with the children.

Ellen and I were being trained by Savior Tana in combat that went beyond swordsmanship.

Goro.

It was a slippery slope that could crack at any moment, but in the end, I had a decent first semester.

Of course, it wasn't exactly the same as my freshman year.

On a typical weekend, I'd spend my time on the training grounds battling Ellen, and if that wasn't enough, catching up on research at the Ministry of Magic.

But now that I'm in my second year, things have changed and life is a little different.

Tana had almost given up her job as a chanapelle maker to devote her time to training the two of us, but you can't drop everything.

On weekends, she seemed to return to the palace to attend to Shanapelle's business. She had a tight schedule to begin with, but she seemed to be living it even more tightly.

I wondered if even a grandmaster would fall down like that.

So I was coached by Saviolin Tana on weekdays, and we trained on our own on weekends.

The senior combat training grounds were quite a distance from the dorms, so Ellen and I were the only two people there, and we were hell-bent on clashing swords.

The intensity of the combat is higher and rougher than what we've been used to on the training grounds.

Ellen used ramen, I used alsbringer or tiamata. I could have used lapelt, but I couldn't.

Before my sword even touched Ellen's body, a wave of flame from my lapel sent me flying.

It was impossible to break through the force of the Rapelt, which was like an automatic interceptor system.

So we alternated between Ellen using only Ramen and me using both holy items, and we clashed swords for the rest of the day.

-Bang! Kakang!

If last year's Ellen and today's me went head-to-head, I would have won.

But a year later, I'm still no match for Ellen.

Because just as I am stronger than I was last year, Ellen is stronger than she was last year.

-Bang!

Ellen used the force of my thrusts to yank my sleeve, flipping me onto my stomach in an articulated piledriver, and holding the blade to my throat.

"It's dead."

"......It doesn't matter because it's going to be recalled anyway."

"......Yes."

Here, they attack each other with all their might, even slashing and stabbing. But after a year of playing against each other, Ellen had gotten into the habit of stopping more often than not. It had become a habit for her to stop just before I could deliver the final blow.

We were close together, Ellen's sweaty hair and slightly ragged breath touching.

This state of being in close proximity to each other is no longer awkward for us.

Ellen stares down at me, puzzled, and mumbles something.

"The smell of sweat."

"......Don't you think you can fly?"

"......."

At that, Ellen stared at me blankly, then jumped to her feet.

"I'm going to wash up."

No.

No!

Just saying!

I don't smell sweat, you do!

I regretted my habit of giving something away once I heard it.

Episode 393.

The senior combat training center we use is a huge facility. But it's not a place that just anyone can use.

We were the only two people inside the area we chose to use for confidentiality and security reasons, but it was definitely equipped with facilities, including showers.

Once you're here, you look like you've been playing baseball, so I always take a shower when I go home, and I always bring a change of clothes. Not just one outfit, but several.

It's still around 12:00, and you've just gotten back from breakfast.

It was time for lunch, but we were still training after lunch, so we were going to spend the rest of the day here killing it and doing combat training.

By the way.

"I'm done for the day."

I got out of the shower first and was back in the waiting room when Ellen came back and said.

It doesn't look like he's pouting. His mouth isn't sticking out.

At this rate, I'm guessing you're not going to do it tomorrow.

It seems like something I said without realizing it made Ellen think about something she hadn't thought about before?

For the first time in a year, it occurred to me that, just as he had smelled my sweat during all the bumping and grinding, I might be doing the same.

You'd think I didn't mind because I hadn't said anything until now, but I just didn't say anything, but I must have been smelling it to death.

Ellen stood still, staring at her white toes in her slippers, saying nothing about what she was thinking.

"No....... Hey......."

"......."

"Just saying....... It smells like sweat or something......."

"Don't......."

Ellen's voice is shaking.

"Oh, don't say anything....... Don't say anything......."

Ellen's cheeks were bright red as she hung her head.

One misplaced slip of the tongue, and Ellen's mentality cracked.

I forgot, Ellen is eighteen after all.

You know, the kind of person who would be sensitive to such things.......

Ellen's mind exploded with one word: sweat.

Ellen couldn't even blame me because she brought it up first.

Uh oh.

You didn't fight for any other reason, and the smell of sweat is going to keep you from practicing swordsmanship together in the future.

I mean, really? I'm not in a position to care about that?

But in this situation, it's bad no matter what you say.

Me - I'm sorry I said that.

Ellen - So you're saying it did smell?

The conclusion is that you shouldn't apologize.

Me - You didn't smell like sweat?

Ellen - Then why did you say that? You're saying that because you're sorry. You're saying that because you're sorry. So you're saying that it did smell?

Very likely to have the same result.

Me - I did smell like sweat, but when you're sweating, you're supposed to smell like sweat, right?

This is the worst thing you can say without even trying to imagine what the answer will be.

After all, no matter what you say, you're only going to shock Ellen's mind.

So I'm sitting there, unable to do anything, and Ellen's head is hanging down, on the verge of shame.

Our Dumbfounded.

In the old days, when something like this happened, you'd be like, "I'm sweating, so I smell like sweat. It would have been like this.

I've become a girl.

But hey.

Tiptoeing around and not knowing what to do.

That's cute.

Cute is cute, but we can't let our brains grind to powder.

And then there was the guilt that bounced back in a way that was scary to think about.

I should say.

Now, I have to say.

My jaw dropped.

"Reinhardt."

Ellen calls out to me, curling her toes.

"Uh....... Yeah."

"You've been a little weird lately."

I think it was partly because I sensed her mood that she wanted to stop here. Ellen cautiously turns her head toward me.

"What's wrong?"

There's no way Ellen didn't see the tip of my knife shaking.

So Ellen's been holding her tongue, and now she's asking.

You should say.

"......."

However, I ended up saying nothing.

I couldn't figure out how to get my luck going.

Ellen stares at me for a moment, then she moves closer to me and nuzzles my neck. The scent of her hair and the nape of her neck tickles my nose.

"It can be unsettling."

I wonder if he thought I was getting nervous because the battle with the demon was approaching and the intensity of my training was increasing.

Ellen wraps her arms around my neck and whispers in my ear.

"You'll be fine."

Everything will be fine.

Anything, anything.

That everything will be fine.

Ellen whispers in my ear constantly.

The more she did, the more the guilt that gnawed at me grew exponentially.

If I listened to any more of Ellen's little whispers, I was going to lose my mind.

So, I gently grabbed Ellen's arm that was holding me and released it.

"Hey."

"......Yes."

"Hey, let's just hang out."

"......?"

Yes.

I was so exhausted.

"We've been running too much lately. If you'd rather rest, let's just go play."

Let's take a break.

It's like you're running so hard that you don't have time to take a break, you don't have time to clear your mind, and the things you need to say keep getting pushed to the back of your mind.

Let's cool our heads a bit.

And, let's say.

At my comment, Ellen's eyes narrowed, and she nodded slightly.

"......Yes."

Somehow. He sounded like he was feeling a little better.

\* \* \*

You could go out on Temple Main Street, but it's Saturday.

This means that tomorrow is Sunday, and we have quite a bit of free time to play.

"Let's bring the other kids along."

Ellen said that if they were going to play, she wanted the other kids to come along. I was surprised because I thought she was going to ask for just the two of us.

I'm about to say something important.

You don't have to keep it to yourself. It's a story that everyone will eventually know.

Adelia was at the Magical Research Institute, while Riana and Clifford seemed to be busy with physical training.

Ellen and I weren't exactly thrilled to see Riana, who would jump at the chance to play, refuse to play on the weekend.

"You're going to play?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"We don't know that yet."

At least Herriot, who was headed to the Imperial Ministry of Magic, looked a little troubled, but agreed to go.

Harriet, me, and Ellen.

The three of us walked out of the temple.

In the original, Ellen was a nerdy, sword-wielding nerd who stayed in her rehearsal hall, and she's not much different now.

In the original, Herriot was a nerd, albeit an unapologetic one, and now he's just cute, but still a nerd.

Then, I realized something else that made me freeze.

"......What do you think?"

Ellen cocked her head at me, noticing my strange mood.

"I just realized something very surprising."

"Yes."

"Am I, in fact, a huge nerd?"

"......?"

"Wow."

Much to my dismay and surprise.......

I'm a nerd, so to speak.

He woke up at the crack of dawn every day to train, and on weekends, unless he had something else going on, he and Ellen would lock themselves in the training room to hone their specialty: swordsmanship.

Most of the things I do are asshole things, so I'm actually a pretty exceptional nerd among nerds. And not just in terms of academics, but in terms of accomplishments in my major, I'm second only to Ellen in the Temple sophomore class.

Ellen and Harriet stare at me with their mouths slightly open at my cheesy nerd appeal.

"......That's not exactly wrong."

"Yeah. I hate to admit it, but it's true......."

Upon reflection, I realized that they weren't wrong, which made it all the more alarming.

Reinhardt is a model student.

Bastardized schoolboy.

Anyway, Ellen is a nerd, Harriet is a nerd, and I'm a nerd.

So, if you've never played with it before, you're not sure what to expect.

I walked out of the temple.

I don't know where to go. You decide to play, but what should you play?

The only thing I can think of doing with them is eating, although that's more Ellen-oriented.

"I want to go to the ocean."

Ellen said something that neither I nor Harriet saw coming.

Ocean.

"The ocean? Isn't that a long way to go?"

There are no beaches near the ecliptic gradient.

"You can't go wrong with that."

"How? Because the gate has a queue......."

"Because I'm a great man, I have this."

Herriot's eyes widened at my imperial crest.

"No you can't do this....... Oh....... I see......."

When I realized that I was the owner of Alsbringer, I felt like I understood how I got it.

And, naturally, heads turn.

"And Ellen?"

"Yes."

Ellen also took the imperial crest from her bosom and showed it to Harriet. Herriot looks at the two imperial crests in front of him and stares at me blankly.

"Wow....... So now I can send you......."

"He's technically more noble than you. How does it feel to be honored, Grand Duchess? How does it feel to receive someone of royalty?"

"Hey, profit, you, you're not supposed to say that, you bastard!"

-Pak-Pak!

“어허! 이게 어디 황족에 준하는 존재의 몸에 손을 함부로 대? 어? 불경죄로 잡혀가고 싶어?”

"Wow, wow....... Wow. This, this garbage....... This is garbage......."

Her cheeks flushed bright red as she realized that he was going to jump right on the subject of her identity.

Anyway, we can go anywhere with a warp gate.

It's still a little too cold to go in the ocean. After Harriet had recovered from her shock and awe, I looked at Ellen.

"Do you just want to see the ocean or do you want to go to the ocean where you can swim?"

"It would be nice to be able to swim."

Then you can go to the tropics. Why not? It's also Saturday, so I don't think it would be a big deal if we went out and slept in.

Warp Gate System.

As far as this goes, it's a lot better than where I used to live.

A beach where you can swim.

As I thought about it, I remembered a place.

"Hey, why don't we go near where we did that desert island mission?"

"Yes."

"Wow! Really?!"

By the looks on Ellen and Harriet's faces, they were both in full agreement.

"It must have been the Kamsencha Archipelago."

"Yeah, I think I did."

Me and Harriet had completely forgotten about it, but Ellen remembered it right down to the name.

\* \* \*

Imperial Territory, Kamsencha Archipelago.

I don't know much about the Kamsencha Archipelago, as it was the location of a desert island group mission, but I was teleported there by a mage after arriving via a warp gate.

Ellen and I strode through the warp gates, our imperial crests flying.

Herriot seemed to marvel at how swiping the imperial crest on any warp gate gave him a free pass.

"There's no stop-and-frisk at all."

"I suppose."

When you use the warp gate, you're supposed to describe where you're going, identify yourself, and the purpose of your trip, but there were no checks on any of that. Neither Ellen nor I, nor our traveling companion, Harriet.

Passing through a series of massive warp gates, the guards froze at the sight of the imperial crest as only the warp gate to Kamsencha Island remained.

"You mean Kamsencha Island, old man, I'll get you straight to it!"

The guards were frozen in their tracks, as if this was the first time they'd ever seen someone with an imperial crest in a provincial city.

Just like that, we were on our way to Kamsencha Island in the Kamsencha Archipelago in almost no time at all.

However, upon arrival on Kamsencha Island, the hot air and humid weather brought back memories of last year's desert island mission.

The gate I'd just walked through was hot, but this place was literally the real deal.

"Am I the only one who feels a bit of regret as soon as I see ......?"

"......me too."

"......."

Naturally.

In a humid region, you're bound to sweat. Herriot rubbed his hands together as soon as he arrived.

Ellen looked at the nape of her neck with a puzzled expression, then at me.

"I'm going back."

Really this.

Better to die than to suffer.

"I never once thought you smelled like sweat. I wore it when I thought I should, and I never once thought I didn't like it."

"......?"

"......Sweaty? What do you mean?"

Ellen looked a little puzzled at my impatient, straight-talking response.

Herriot didn't seem to understand what I was talking about.

No.......

Even though I'm worried about his mental state.

That's a very perverted thing to say.

Ellen looked thoughtful, then shook her head.

"...... Do you like the smell of my sweat? Why?"

That smell can't be good, why is it good?

Do you even like me enough to smell my sweat?

I know you don't mean it that way, but when you look at me like that, it makes me think!

You've been with me all day, and you want to go to class with me? I feel like that!

"Please, let's stop making each other sound crazy."

"......Why are you crazy?"

"Uh, this is going to make me spin, stop."

"Yes."

"The smell of sweat......? Do you like that?"

Herriot said, sounding a little fed up.

"No, it's not like that!"

"Then what is it?"

As I tried to explain something to Harriet, Ellen grabbed my sleeve and shook her head vigorously from side to side.

I'll kill you if you say it.

"Let's go."

But we didn't know much about Kamsencha Island. For one thing, our desert island mission was on one of the many deserted islands scattered around the island, and we had no idea where they were.

Kamsencha Island, on the other hand, is obviously inhabited and is an imperial territory, so while it's not a large city, there are people and shops everywhere.

It was still early spring on the ecliptic and chilly, and we hadn't realized that by the time we left the temple we would be in the Kamsencha archipelago, over a thousand miles from the ecliptic.

So, there we were, in our casual clothes and coats, totally out of place in the tropics.

"Should I use magic?"

Herriot could have done something similar to what Elise did for us last time in Darklands with her Chilling Touch magic.

"Gee, you must have come from a cold place. You'll freeze to death if you go around dressed like that, buy some clothes."

Vendors on the street even stopped us and asked us to buy new clothes.

"Magic is nice, but let's buy clothes in the first place."

"Yes."

Since the sea was blowing and we were in a steamer in this humid weather, we naturally made our way to the clothing store.

\* \* \*

Ellen wears a white airy dress, a round straw hat, and light sandals.

Herriot wore a very large t-shirt, short shorts, and flip-flops. Sort of a missing persons fashion, if that makes sense.

I wore flip-flops, shorts, and something like an aloha shirt.

I also just bought a swimsuit in case I wanted to go swimming.

"That's better."

"Sure."

"If you need magic, I can give it to you."

It's like I asked you to come over to my house to hang out, and now I feel like I'm traveling, but then again, everywhere the warp gate goes is my backyard anyway.

Dressed in a white dress and straw hat, Ellen's limbs were white and slender, giving her a dazzling appearance, as if she were reflecting light. Her hair was down now, which was a new sensation for Harriet.

The beach was just around the corner, and Ellen ate one of the coconuts sold on the street. It reminded her of home.

"......empty."

"Really? I thought it was delicious......."

Harriet took a sip of the coconut Ellen held out to her, and her face went pale.

"That's right....... Empty."

It was quite a sight to behold, the two of them chattering away over a single coconut. Ellen carried the coconut with her. She's not one to throw away food.

As I stood there staring at them. The two walking ahead of me looked back at me and said.

"What are you doing?"

"Come on in. You're getting sunburned."

"Uh, yeah."

You've changed your clothes for the weather. It was time to get down to business.

"I'm hungry."

"Me too."

I actually had reason to be hungry, since I hadn't eaten lunch during my morning training session. Herriot didn't seem to have eaten lunch either, and judging by the way they were both biting their lips and looking worried, it was clear that they wanted something to eat.

I wanted to go to the ocean.

Then I remembered the desert island group mission and came to the Kamsencha archipelago.

I'd have to say these are the only two things I'd want to eat right now.

"Do you want lobster?"

"Yes."

"That's right!"

Both strongly affirmed my opinion.

Episode 394.

I don't know much about the Kamsencha archipelago, but it's clear that marine products are a specialty here.

"I felt it last time, but what's so big?"

Herriot's eyes widened as he looked at the giant lobster that had been cooked.

"Bigger is better."

"What's not to like about growing up with ...... as long as it's something to eat?"

"Well."

"Just saying."

Most restaurants were selling seafood dishes, and the prices were very cheap for the ecliptic. We started with a buttered lobster, about five times the size of a typical lobster, and dipped our forks into it.

"Mmmm, I haven't had it in a long time, so I guess it tastes like that!"

Herriot smiled happily and shivered. I've always felt that way, but she's a reactionary. Come to think of it, she didn't eat much else, but she did eat lobster.

I think giving him my share when I was hungry for more helped mend my relationship with him.

-Omnomnomnom

Ellen was eating eagerly, as if she had time for one more word.

If you think about it, the ocean near the uninhabited islands was overflowing with seafood, including lobsters and octopus. Given the abundance of marine resources, the Kamsencha Archipelago could have made a living distributing such seafood through warp gates.

I guess the tourist resources aren't bad, but maybe the deserted island we went to was a little special.

I hadn't eaten lunch either, but it was interesting to see Ellen eating a giant lobster, even though it's something I see all the time. Harriet, well, she's eating with the grace and elegance of an aristocrat, teasing her fork, but Ellen is a fast eater.

Ellen was wearing a white dress.

It looks like she's eating nonstop, but Ellen is careful not to get any on her dress.

Despite eating steadily, Ellen's clothes didn't get a bit of food on them until she finally finished the lobster.

"I don't know if eating without getting buried counts as a talent, but you do."

"......."

"No, I'm just saying that I eat pretty clean, so why is your mouth sticking out?"

Isn't that technically a compliment?

I didn't say it's amazing that you can eat that stuff and not get buried!

"I got in trouble a lot back in the day."

"...... Oh yeah?"

"I won't blame you for eating a lot, but don't get buried and eat it. To Daddy."

"I can't really imagine Ellen getting yelled at......."

Ellen's father.

Did you look at your daughter and tell her to stop eating, that it's all good, but don't bury it and eat it, while swallowing back tears of blood?

"So, getting buried and eating is a product of hard work, not talent?"

"Yes."

Somehow, I'm not hating on him for eating like that, because I've put in the work.

It's kind of cute.

This was the first time I'd ever heard Ellen get in trouble for eating in the past, so it was kind of refreshing. In retrospect, it was around this time last year that Ellen and I started sharing food when I caught her gorging herself on jerky in the wee hours of the morning.

Although we didn't do the mission ourselves, being on Kamsencha Island brought back memories of last year. Ellen and Harriet seemed to be doing the same.

"I was really scared when it suddenly rained."

Herriot shuddered at the memory.

I knew it was raining, but it's one thing to know it's raining, it's another thing to be caught in it. I must have brought her back to my den when it was blown away and she was shivering.

Herriot's eyes grew wistful, as if he was reminiscing.

"Why, if I really wanted to, I could find a deserted island somewhere and do it one more time with properties until Sunday."

"When did you say we were going to do this again?!"

Memories are memories, and I don't want to do it all over again, Herriot said.

"If I did it again, I don't think I'd do it much differently."

Ellen said.

Herriot, who had been concentrating hard to create a single fireball, now had a near-instant casting ability.

Ellen was still a fighter, but now she could be enchanted.

That sturdy orc could now be attacked by dozens of them and still be sliced to pieces with just a little ramen.

Hunting, gathering, and surviving would be easier than ever.

"Okay, that's not as hard as it used to be."

Herriot nodded in agreement. Something that would have been a death sentence once upon a time, if she were to face it again, she would be able to shrug it off like it was no big deal.

A lot of things have been made easier.

So I know it won't be as hard as it used to be, but it won't be as fulfilling either.

Herriot didn't look too happy.

\* \* \*

Kamsencha is a vacation spot, so there were quite a few people coming and going.

There were quite a few tourists on the white sandy beach with emerald blue waters against a clear blue sky.

If the water was half people and half water, it would have been a little awkward, but thankfully it wasn't. There were a few people lying on sunbeds under parasols, and some bungalows set up on the beach.

Ellen stared at the beach, then ran her hand down the skirt of her dress.

-Hullo!

"Eh, Ellen!"

"What are you doing....... Oh, are you wearing?"

"Yes."

Ellen was wearing a bikini, which she had thrown on as soon as she bought it. Harriet freaked out when Ellen suddenly tried to undress her, then breathed a sigh of relief when she realized she was wearing a blue swimsuit.

"Me too....... I'm going to go change into my swimsuit."

Harriet went to the changing rooms set up on the beach, and I went to change into my swimsuit.

It was still early spring and the sun was shining, unlike the chilly ecliptic.

It was gorgeous weather and scenery.

But I have something to say today.

So, no matter what I looked at, I didn't feel very good about it.

\* \* \*

I went swimming.

We swam a little differently than everyone else. Herriot cast an underwater breathing spell on all three of us, and we could go out to sea as far as we could scuba dive.

So how many people were on the beach didn't really matter to us in the first place. We're not on the beach, we're offshore, we're out in the ocean, we're almost like doing underwater exploration, we're barely out of the water.

In missions, I'd come into the ocean to hunt, but now I was swimming purely for fun.

There were some hiccups.

Or Ellen freaks out at a shark that appears out of nowhere and summons Ramen to intercept it.

Or that Herriot was suddenly caught in a downward tide, plunged to the bottom of the ocean, and was forced up by magically creating a current.

In retrospect, there were some risky things that happened, but everyone was capable, so it didn't matter.

I ended up spending the day in the water without incident, getting out, resting, and getting back in.

Night time.

We had dinner at a nearby restaurant. Harriet was exhausted, and in the midst of eating her dinner, she collapsed on the table.

Ellen and I are actually less active than usual, so we had some energy left over.

"Dinner is dinner, and what are you going to do? If you're going to sleep here, I think you should find a place to sleep."

Tomorrow is Sunday, so you don't have to go back today.

"I'm not going anywhere....... I don't want to sleep in a strange place....... I'm not going anywhere......."

Judging by the way Herriot, stretched out like a jellyfish, was mumbling to himself, it was clear that he was beyond drained.

"Well, let's find a place to rest."

"Ugh....... Thanks......."

Ellen stroked Herriot's head as she did so.

\* \* \*

Finding a place to rest was easy. Instead of staying in an inn, I rented a bungalow on the beach. Since I could afford it, and since it was a tourist destination, I was able to find a good place to stay. The bedrooms were all separate, so I knew I wouldn't be in any awkward situations.

Our fairly large overwater bungalow even had a pool, albeit a small one.

But we'd been in the water all day, and it was night, so we were more likely to sit and stare at the ocean after getting cleaned up and changed than swim.

"I never thought I'd be in this place until this morning."

"Me too."

While the warp gate allows us to travel long distances, it's not often that we actually get to do so. Herriot looks at me and Ellen, smiling as if he's remembered something.

"Heh, if Riana was here, I'd ask her for a drink......."

Herriot said, and then froze.

Definitely.

At night, after coming to a place like this, Riana would have asked for a drink. But now, Riana has become the kind of girl who says she's busy when asked to go out, and even if she did come, she wouldn't ask for a drink.

Things have changed, people have changed, and behavior has changed.

We sat on the terrace, the three of us, in a daze.

"It's only been a year, and so much has changed."

Herriot muttered, head down, a hint of melancholy in his voice.

Once a haughty duchess, Herriot has softened, but she has also learned to love melancholy.

Ellen vowed never to live like her brother, but now she understands him.

After the death of her father, Riana was freed from a life of idleness.

A lot has changed.

And not to mention me. I'm forced to be a warrior because I have a holy relic, and that was true of Ellen, too.

This change has been both positive and negative.

They've all changed in some way, but the common thread is that they're all stronger than the original.

And because they all felt the threat of the demon, they were all desperate to some degree.

"If everything had stayed the same....... that wouldn't have been so bad."

Herriot mumbles something incoherent.

Riana is still lazy, I'm still an asshole, and Ellen just likes to eat dumplings.

No need to be strong, no pressure to be strong.

I wish it would just stay that way. Harriet says this from her bungalow in this calm, serene, vacation spot.

Ellen put a hand on Harriet's shoulder and held her still.

"We'll be fine. Whatever."

Anything will work.

That everything will be fine.

As if soothing a child, Ellen whispers softly to Harriet. Herriot puts his hand on Ellen's arm, still, and nods.

To Ellen, who believes everything will be okay. To Harriet.

I should say, from now on.

You can't put it off forever.

-chirrrrr

The sound of grasshoppers could be heard from the shore.

Just as it is eternally winter in the castle of Epirus, it will be eternally summer here.

The sun beats down on the ocean and coastline year-round, and it's probably always going to look like this.

There is no eternal winter and no eternal summer for me.

I don't know what to call the seasons I've been through since arriving at Temple.

"Hey, I have something to tell you guys....... to tell you guys."

From now on, you'll have to live with a different season.

\* \* \*

The explanation was long-winded.

But when I said the key word, I couldn't help but see their faces harden.

An engagement thrown out of the blue.

Naturally, Harriet and Ellen didn't know what I was talking about. Suddenly, they were engaged.

I explained myself. I was making each other feel weird and terrible, but I couldn't help it.

I couldn't explain everything, but I could give you a general idea of what was going on.

After returning from Demon Castle, Charlotte was experiencing something of an after-effect.

How I risked my life to save Charlotte.

And Charlotte, who can barely keep up with her own health, has fallen behind in the race to the throne and now has her own faction turning against her.

To the point where Bertus isn't the problem, but rather a renegade from within who may endanger your life.

So, I need a reason to protect her, so I betroth her to me, the owner of Alsbringer, to prevent her from alienating her supporters, so that she can survive.

No one asked him why he was going out of his way for Charlotte.

I didn't say that I was forced to make this choice to save Charlotte's life.

I want to keep Charlotte because I love her, and I want to marry her because I love her, and that's the way it's going to be for both of us, and I'm not going to say no to that.

They'll take that as a given.

I made a choice.

Trying to fumble with something else is just plain silly.

"......a."

Herriot stared at me, frozen, dumbfounded.

-Took

Ellen's face was expressionless, just a single tear rolling down her cheek.

I didn't say sorry, because that's even weirder.

The moment you say you're sorry, things will only get weirder, and everyone will feel even worse than they already do.

With that said, I stared out at the ocean.

The gentle waves were constantly crashing onto the shore.

Ellen said nothing, just kept her head down.

Herriot looks at Ellen, and then at me, forcing himself to make a face.

It was a strange look, one that I don't know what to call.

"He, yeah. He....... You, ha....... He...... made it big....... How come....... How did something like you....... How did......."

Finally, as she tries to say something, Herriot's face contorts into a miserable grimace.

"How did....... replace....... Why......."

Herriot was crying, and I couldn't look him in the eye.

Ellen, her head bowed, said nothing.

"Were you lying?"

In a very small voice, he said something like that.

It didn't say what it was about.

But I know what moment you're talking about.

The day they handed me the rappel.

I reject that.

What he said next.

It's the story of the day.

I knew what I was going to say.

"......."

Ellen didn't ask any more questions.

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No more words were exchanged.

Both Ellen and Harriet retired to their respective bedrooms to sleep without a word, leaving me sitting on the terrace, staring idly at the lapping shore.

I made this choice because if I didn't, I would lose Charlotte.

Therefore, I have lost something else. I can't explain exactly what I lost, but I lost something and I will lose something.

This is not the end of the story.

I must be a hero.

Only when it is known that I am the master of Alsbringer, and I have gained public fame, will I have political standing as a princess betrothed to such a hero.

Inclusion in the Warrior's Yellow House.

Bertus wanted it. I'm not sure exactly what Bertus' intentions were in reigniting a fight that was already over. Was it really just for fun, or was there some other ulterior motive.

However, I have to be the hero.

To be a hero, you have to do something, not just be known as the master of Alsbringer.

You have to do a lot of things that are obviously dangerous.

-shoot

On a beautiful beach, with the sound of waves and grasshoppers mingling, I spent the night unable to fall asleep.

\* \* \*

The engagement of the beggar Reinhardt to the princess Charlotte de Gradias would have been laughable a year ago.

But now it was funny in a different way.

An empress who is losing her political standing.

The master of Alsbringer, the most powerful symbol of the post-Magma War holy artifacts.

The successor to Lagan Artorius, so to speak.

The betrothal had now become a nonsense, as the descendant of a warrior should marry a mere princess.

The three left for the Kamsencha Archipelago and returned the next day. Conversation was scarce. Ellen was speechless, Reinhard could not speak, and Herriot was silent, knowing that he wanted to say something, but that no words could answer.

I wasn't in any condition to train.

Reinhardt locked himself in his room, while Ellen wandered around the dorm in a daze.

In the main lobby on the second floor, Ellen could see Charlotte de Gradias returning to the temple from the palace.

Naturally, Ellen and Charlotte's eyes met.

"Uh, ah....... How are you?"

Charlotte can say hello to Ellen because, despite their different classes, they've crossed paths and are by no means strangers.

It can happen.

But even as you raise your hand to say hello, your fingertips tremble slightly.

Wiggly eyes.

That gives Ellen some kind of signal.

Charlotte seemed to feel guilty just looking at her. It had been that way the last few times they'd crossed paths.

Ellen didn't remember much up until that point.

But only because I now know the implications of Charlotte's behavior.

Reinhardt had been acting a little strange lately, the tip of his sword wobbling, and he seemed uneasy.

That it wasn't the devil, it was this problem, and that I didn't know how to explain it to myself.

Now you just know.

When Ellen does not return the greeting, she moves toward Charlotte, who vaguely glances at her. As Ellen approaches, Charlotte takes a half step back, looking slightly frightened.

Ellen is also a commoner, after all, but she is the wielder of the Lament and the sister of Lagan Artorius.

From the time she entered Temple, Ellen was a person whose status, if not her identity, was second to none.

It's just that Ellen never once tried to take advantage of it.

That's why Ellen has never been intimidated by anyone.

Ellen looks the Empress in the eye.

"Tell me one."

"Huh? Uh....... Uh-huh."

Ellen asks, looking at the Empress with a slight bite to her lip.

"Reinhard, do you like it?"

"......."

Charlotte's eyes widened, as if she hadn't expected him to ask her so bluntly. She could have walked away, embarrassed and wondering why he would ask such a question.

But the look on Ellen's face when she asked me that was like she was going to slap me if I ran away.

Charlotte must have intuited what Ellen knew because of her question.

Engagement.

Knowing what I know about the matter, I'm frustrated, but I know I can't change Reinhardt's mind, so that's all I can ask Charlotte.

Charlotte looked into Ellen's eyes as she did so.

"Yes."

Say what you mean when you feel like crap.

"A lot....... a lot....... a lot."

Ellen could see it in Charlotte's eyes. At least Reinhardt wasn't being used by Charlotte. If Charlotte was just using Reinhardt to stay alive, Ellen didn't know what she would do.

But Charlotte is sincere. We don't know when it started, but Charlotte leans heavily on Reinhardt, and even in this situation, she likes him enough to feel sorry for him, rather than happy for him.

One last bit of anticipation.

Because it broke.

Ellen is dumbfounded.

"I......."

After mumbling something incoherent, Ellen stopped.

Me first.

More from me.

I.

Much more time.

"......."

The more she said, the more miserable she felt, but Ellen couldn't bring herself to say it.

In front of Charlotte de Gradias, whose face contorts in guilt at the mere sight of herself.

I liked him before you did. I was with Reinhard when everyone thought he was a lowly beggar, and I was with him, and I wouldn't trade it for anything.

In this situation, Reinhardt has to choose you because his life is in danger.

This is so unfair.

Ellen couldn't say that.

"Sorry......."

In the face of Charlotte's shattered expression, Ellen averts her gaze.

"......."

It was painful to see Charlotte so unhappy with a subject that had what she wanted most.

\* \* \*

In the dorms, Ellen and Harriet would pass me by without a word.

Herriot didn't know what to say, and Ellen simply walked past with her head down.

Rather than disliking me, it seemed to be a slightly different issue.

Now I don't know what to do with it, so I'm avoiding it.

The funny thing is. Just as Ellen and Harriet found it difficult to deal with me, so did Charlotte. When Charlotte saw me, she hesitated, as if she didn't know what to say, and ended up saying nothing.

I wonder if they feel weird saying thank you or sorry.

However, no matter what I said, I was supposed to take my major classes with Ellen.

I had a similar feeling to the first time I saw Ellen in first grade.

In front of me was Ellen Artorius, a cold, emotionless woman who seemed unwilling to feel anything for me.

The tip of the sword was not emotional, but rather restrained.

It was a dry lesson where he just beat me in the exact right way at the exact right time.

Ellen never said a word to me about anything personal, which is why our lessons lasted all day.

"That's it for today. Go back and get some rest."

After class, Saviolin Tana said. Ellen left without a word.

"Reinhardt, you stay behind."

"Yes."

I thought I knew why she'd called me. In the waiting room of the senior combat training center, with Ellen gone and me alone, she sat down next to me and put her arm around me.

"I have heard that you are engaged to be married to the Empress."

"Yes."

"......."

She looked toward the exit of the waiting room, a complicated expression on her face.

"Your Majesty has had many thoughts on this matter. Whether or not to publicly announce your presence."

Making my presence public would ensure Charlotte's safety, but it could also put me in danger. The Emperor was therefore treading carefully in this matter.

"The imperial court will take no position. But in aristocratic circles, word will spread."

"I see."

"Yeah, because that's the only safe thing to do."

It's not Bertus, but Charlotte's supporters who are in trouble, and to stop them, rumors are spreading through the imperial and aristocratic circles.

The next heir to Alsbringer has arrived, and he and the princess are engaged to be married.

It's a way to stabilize the unstable status quo without taking a public stance.

"You know what this is meant to be....... what this is intended to do."

"It's ......."

It's a scandal, to say the least. When the imperial family doesn't make any official statements about a rumor of that magnitude, it's both to tacitly imply that it's true and to later dismiss it as baseless gossip.

It's about keeping me from being overly tied to the imperial family in any way.

Probably.

That would be Charlotte's will.

"Once it is known that you are the master of Alsbringer, you will inevitably face danger. Even in the Temple, you're not necessarily safe, and the Demon will target you first. You know that."

"Yes."

I'm the devil, so how can I be a threat to you. That part of the equation doesn't matter, so there's really nothing to lose.

It's not the fact that you're engaged that matters.

I need to build up my achievements.

As word of the Alsbringer's owner spreads through the aristocracy, you'll need achievements to show that you're a badass.

Soon, you'll need to do some hero making.

"It could be any number of things. There will be a demon extermination in the Darklands, smaller groups of demons and bandits, and you have Tiamata, so slaying the undead should be easy. Of course, if you are physically present to ensure your safety, Shanapelle's reinforcements will take care of that for you."

The Empire doesn't like me being dangerous. So you're not literally becoming a hero, you're hero-making.

All that matters is that I was there, and the real fights and battles are handled by veterans better than me. And then I pass it off as something I did. In other words, I eat my reputation alive.

That's good for me and good for the empire.

"I don't intend to do that."

"......."

"You'll have to figure it out yourself, whatever that is."

"Reinhard, I know you're not full of yourself. But if you put yourself in harm's way and get hurt, I'm not going to......."

"My fake reputation, inflated by my fake skills, will put me in more danger, because no matter what I do, if it becomes known that it was made up, it could make things worse."

The bigger the task I didn't solve myself, the more I overestimate my skills. This makes me more dangerous. Of course, the Devil will never threaten me, but this is more to avoid the Temple's scrutiny.

I'd rather be alone than active.

So I'm going to do something with my hands, not hero-making, but something real, and it has to be. Saviolin Tana looked at me, then nodded.

"I thought that's what you would say."

It's almost as if he had a good idea that I wouldn't like that, given my personality.

I don't need someone who is overly stronger than me. I'd love to, but I'm afraid that if I did, they'd become my shackles.

Saviolin Tana stares at me, silenced by my comment that she doesn't need help.

"From now on, special activities will replace all classes, soon. This means that your time in Special Activities will count as time spent in the Temple curriculum."

The implication is that you've become such a special student that you don't mind wandering outside the temple.

"Do you know about Levaina?"

"If it's Leviathan....... Wasn't there a raid there not too long ago?"

"Yeah."

The site of a secret imperial operation disguised as a demon raid. It was there that Duke Granz died.

"Go to Raziern, the capital of Levaina."

There is an investigation into a demonic attack, but I know it's not really a demonic attack.

You're sending me there because there can't possibly be a demonic threat? I know there's nothing to be gained there.

"You'll find Olivia Ranze in the Special Investigations Unit there."

Olivia Ranze.

I was a little taken aback by the unexpected name.

"Go help Olivia. If there's a crisis, Olivia and the people at the Bureau can handle it. There's less chance of anything dangerous happening."

Speaking of which.

It had been a while since Olivia had visited me.

It's not that they didn't come, it's that they weren't in the temple at all.

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I had no idea Olivia wasn't at the Temple. She must have had a good reason for not telling me.

And Olivia had taken a leave of absence from school to go to the rear of the Demon War.

According to Saviolin Tana, Olivia has volunteered her resources to the investigation in Raziern, the capital of Levaina.

I wonder if they're trying to follow the demon's trail there, but even if they did, the only thing they'd find there would be the fact that it's not the demon's trail, it's the empire's own doing.

Why the hell is Olivia there?

You've lied before, saying that you've emptied your temple for a special mission. But this time, you actually have to empty your temple for a special mission or something.

Saviolin Tana sent me there because she thought it wasn't a dangerous area.

I thought about telling Ellen and Harriet that I had to leave the Temple for a special mission, but I didn't. I didn't think it was fair to explain it to them.

So, without further ado, we hit the ground running.

\* \* \*

Just as a few warp gates from the Temple brought me to the Kamsenza Archipelago thousands of kilometers away, so a few warp gates brought me to Levaina, a small world in the southern part of the Empire where Duke Granz died.

It is currently home to the Special Investigations Unit. It will be under the jurisdiction of the Empire, not the Royal House of Levaina.

There was this ridiculous thing going on where the empire was investigating a self-inflicted wound by the empire. And to think that the head of this Special Investigations Unit might know that it was the Empire's own doing.

Olivia doesn't know that.

Olivia wondered why she was here.

The Levainese capital, Raziern, had the feel of a city, but it didn't seem all that bustling. Trying to find an ecliptic-like corner in the capital of a small country was frankly ridiculous.

After questioning the guards, I learned that the Special Investigations Unit occupies an entire government building outside the palace, not inside.

The security was very tight, with men sent directly from the Empire.

Of course, there was no such thing as a door that didn't open in front of the imperial coat of arms.

When I grabbed a passerby and told him I was looking for a woman named Olivia Ranze from the Temple, I was told to wait in the guest room and she would come.

I'm sure the Special Investigations Unit would find this a bit ridiculous.

You're trying to do an investigation, and you've got a graduate recruit from the Temple, and then you've got me with an imperial coat of arms.

Since you presented an imperial coat of arms when you walked in, your report should have gone up the chain of command.

"Are you Mr. Reinhardt?"

"Yes."

"I'm Scotra Kelton, head of the Special Investigations Unit, who has been assigned to oversee this case. It's an honor to meet you."

Scotra Kelton.

He was a middle-aged man.

Naturally, being a stranger, he asked me to shake his hand and bowed politely.

As soon as I took his hand, I felt it. It wasn't so much the force of his grip, but rather the intensity of the impression his hand made on me. The way the man with the imperial coat of arms asked me to shake his hand first, bowing but not bowing.

It's an honor to meet you.

I'm sure you know that I'm the new owner of Alsbringer. I looked at him and asked.

"Are you....... Shanapelle?"

"You're sharp, I'm here on a temporary assignment, but I'm actually the captain of the 3rd Shanapelle."

He nodded as he said that.

This made one thing clear.

Scotra Kelton, the head of the investigation, must have known it was a fabrication.

He said he didn't have time for a long talk, just said hello to me and went on his way.

I had a hunch that the Special Bones weren't for investigations, but when your headquarters is Captain Shanapelle's 3rd Battalion, you know what they say.

I wonder how long they waited.

-delay

"......Hmm?"

Olivia, dressed casually, made eye contact with me as she walked into the state room. Apparently, she'd been through a rough patch, and she was immaculately dressed.

"Reinhard? How did you get here?"

Naturally, Olivia's eyes widened in surprise and she stormed over to me.

"What the hell, how did you get here?"

"There....... Let's sit down and talk."

"Whoa!"

-Wrong!

Olivia suddenly pulled me into a rough hug.

"You're here because you want to see your sister!"

Dear Olivia.

I should explain.

\* \* \*

To explain how I got here, I had to tell the story of my engagement. I had to talk about accomplishments, and I had to explain why I needed to accomplish them.

Olivia's mouth dropped open as I rambled on for a while, explaining that I had been ordered by Savior Tana to help Olivia with her work here.

"What, so you're not here to see me?"

Olivia glared at me with a frown.

No.......

The.

Didn't I say something more important than that?

Why are you angry at such a strange point, sister?

As I froze, Olivia sat down next to me, smiling bashfully, and immediately put her arm around me.

"Oh, no. Come on......."

"What, did I do this because I didn't have a kid with spit on it one day?"

I was left speechless by the bold, bullying attitude.

"An engagement isn't a marriage, you can change your mind, things can change, and it's not over until it's over, right?"

Olivia looks at me, squinting.

"What do you think? The guest room is....... Huh? You and me and....... are the only two?"

Sister.......

I'm not trying to be mean and angry, I like it, but I'm scared!

If anything, it's scarier!

And if you do, you're going to bash my head in and knock me out and run away!

"If it's an engagement, if it's a fling, if it's just a stamp, who cares?"

No.

It's not that he's not shocked, it's that he's shocked.

"Or if you do something to the prince and then you become emperor. He goes second and I go first. Huh?"

"Let's not say anything that might get us caught."

"Is that so?"

Olivia smirked and pulled away from me. I can't tell if she was being nonchalant or not. I guess it's a good thing I can't see it.

Olivia's attitude of not caring because nothing is certain yet seemed somehow plausible.

No.

You're not really thinking about killing Bertus and then I'm going to have some sort of reverse sexual revolution and become emperor and Charlotte is going to be relegated to the concubine position and you're going to be empress?

You've got to be kidding me, right?

If I'm actually a warrior and there is such a thing as a demon, I'm creeped out by the idea that it's not entirely impossible, assuming I kill the demon.

\* \* \*

We had been waiting for Olivia for quite some time, so it was already nighttime.

A guest room at Special Branch Headquarters, near the Royal Palace of Raziern, the capital of Levaina. We were drinking tea while eating dinner brought to us by the Investigations Division.

Olivia is not an investigator, but she is a student from your Temple Royal class.

Technically, they're just volunteers from the university, but they're the ones the empire is working so hard to develop, you never know what might happen if you treat them badly.

And I'm like, well, it's like royalty.

So I froze everyone in their tracks and gave them the ultimate treat.

I'm the one who knows the truth, and I know this investigation is not going to work. Add to that the fact that the head of the investigation is a Shanapelle knight, and I've already said it.

All I've been told by Saviolin Tana is to work with Olivia on her tasks.

Where things will never work out right.

"Why are you here, anyway?"

This will never be a pleasant place for me. It's where I was framed, and it's where the reason for Riana's horrific transformation occurred.

Olivia smirked at my comment.

"I want to find a trail of demons."

"......What do you do when you find it?"

Olivia had already told me that it was the Devil who saved her and Adriana. Olivia had told me that deep down she thought the Devil and his demons might not be so evil after all.

"I just want to be sure."

The last two raids must have seemed somewhat reasonable to Olivia. This time, however, the raid on Raziern was a little more uncomfortable for Olivia, who knew the truth about the last two raids.

No way.

Is Olivia suspecting that this might not be the work of the Devil?

That's what it means to need convincing.

Olivia is torn between having to deal with the demon and the demon that saved her life.

And she said she would definitely be on my side. So that's probably why she's here.

To be convinced that the devil deserved to die, and to gain the strength of mind to fight for me.

You didn't just send Olivia here, you sent me.

Are they so sure we'll never notice that this site is rigged?

"So, did you figure it out?"

"I didn't figure it out, I just saw what was known."

Olivia clicked her tongue briefly, then kicked it.

Olivia walked over to something and spread something out on the table.

A map of Raziern and its environs.

"Well, for one thing, the reports say that a horde of demons was summoned by mass teleportation around Raziern and began its march. It seems to have included a number of orcs and goblins, as well as ogres and trolls. It doesn't seem to have done much damage to Raziern itself, but it was the outlying areas that mattered, and many of those who weren't protected by guards were killed or injured."

The real goal was to kill the revolutionaries, but it was disguised as a demon raid.

This is why there have been so many civilian casualties.

The Empire killed humans with their own hands. Nothing special about it. It's a conspiracy, but it happens all the time. I just feel sorry for the dead.

"Especially here."

Olivia pointed to a few buildings on the outskirts of Raziern.

"Most of the deaths were at the Merchant's Guild branch over here. There was a Merchant's Guild meeting over here, so investors were there. So a lot of the people who died in this raid were pretty influential, and that....... Among your friends......."

Olivia trailed off, and I nodded, knowing what she meant.

"Well, whatever."

From Olivia's point of view, she's trying to be careful what she says, because she doesn't want to be seen as gossiping about the death of her junior's parents.

"I saw it with my own eyes, the demons attacking the Crusaders."

Olivia was one of the few witnesses to the second attack, and even saw the demon actually manifest.

"The first one, the second one, and the raids have something in common."

"What is that?"

"Massive destruction magic was used."

The first time I exorcized a demon, Elyse used Flame of Fire to summon a firestorm, and the second time she summoned a firestorm followed by a lightning storm.

"But in my third raid, I summoned a large number of demons by mass teleportation, not by mass destruction magic. Of course, on the scale of magic, this one is bigger......."

Olivia narrows her brow.

"If casualties were the goal, we could have reduced about a fifth of Raziern to ashes with a firestorm instead of summoning demons. Why didn't we do that? It's a loss of ground, technically."

They were forced to use demons to attack when magic would have solved the problem. Olivia didn't seem to understand the situation.

First of all, Olivia was pretty sure that there was a very powerful wizard among the remnants of the demonic forces, and that's a fact, and it's not a fact that's particularly unique to Olivia, as anyone interested in demonic raids would know that.

There's only one reason most of the public isn't as suspicious of the demons' true intentions as Olivia is.

This is because people don't try to understand the object of their hatred.

Whatever the hated group does, they don't think on the same level as you, so if they do something, you conclude that it must be because they are evil or inferior, and you don't want to think about it anymore. Because hate is a convenient way to simplify thinking.

So the public's reaction to the strangeness of this demonic attack is to be horrified or disgusted, but not to wonder what the demons were really up to.

To make people fear demons. Few would understand and be convinced by that.

But Olivia has seen too much of the ugly side of humans, and having been rescued by demons herself, she is somewhat immune to such thinking.

"If I had to guess, I'd say this is the right answer."

Olivia pointed to a spot on the map, the Merchant Guild branch she had just pointed to.

"The demons were trying to raid this place in the first place."

"......The merchant guild meeting?"

"Right."

Olivia had gotten halfway to the truth, if not the whole truth.

"The demons attacked, and the defended Raziern escaped unscathed, but the outlying Merchant Guild branches, the powerful men who gathered there, were killed in an unprovoked attack? That's ridiculous."

Olivia crosses her arms and shakes her head.

"There were people here, including Duke Granz, Orgencia, who was known for her great gates, and Sangtriden, the vice president of the Magic Society. It wasn't just the escort that was strong, it was the people who were already strong."

The mere fact that people who wouldn't normally get together are in the same room is a testament to that.

"If such a powerful man was coming to Levaina, a small country in the south, not even in the ecliptic, why wouldn't he bring a bodyguard?"

Olivia shakes her head.

"This place was probably better defended than Raziern Castle at that moment, and it wasn't just because it was out of town that it was attacked, it was because the escort that would have been here would have been enough to set Raziern ablaze."

So the demons raided this place, not Raziern.

"So the level of demons that raided Raziern couldn't have gotten through here in the first place. The elite would have raided this way and fallen right out."

Olivia came to that conclusion.

Episode 397.

Olivia's conclusion was not unique. Even when people are in a state of panic, those who are able to think calmly can reason from the list of victims.

But that's not all, they raided a Merchant Guild branch, wiped out a bunch of powerful Imperials, and vaporized. Maybe demons don't need a good reason to kill powerful people in the Empire.

You can terrorize people by showing them that even the most powerful people can be targeted.

So Olivia's reasoning now falls within the realm of what Special Branch investigators, who don't know the truth about the Raziern raid, can figure out.

"In fact, not only were the powerful men who died there, but their escorts were all highly skilled. Not a large number of escorts, but an elite few. The core of the demons' power is missing here."

"I guess so."

"But there's no sign of large-scale destructive magic being used this time, though I suppose it's possible that veterans of melee combat were involved....... If so, it's either proof that the demons are not a minority, or they've grown in strength....... The appearance of hitherto unseen orcs and goblins suggests the latter."

Orcs, goblins, ogres, and trolls.

Olivia seemed to ponder the possibility that the demons had increased their power just by displaying power they hadn't been sending before.

The suspicion that this might not be the work of demons, but of someone else, seemed to elude Olivia, and rightly so.

Even Olivia, who is as disappointed as a human can be, has a limit to her thinking. If I weren't a demon myself, I'd probably have kicked a few tongues out of the demons' mouths at the idea of something like this happening. If I hadn't been a demon myself, I might have thought that there were some suspicious circumstances, but there are so many suspicious things in the world.

I'm sensitive and serious about it because it's my job. If it were some other faraway place, I'd let it go in one ear and out the other. Even if it was about the devil.

"If the demons attacked to wreak havoc on the Empire, they succeeded, and by sending them not only here, but also to Raziern, they've also shown us that their true power is far greater than we expected."

A significant number of suspects were killed, and a horde of demons attacked Raziern, though they were unable to do any significant damage.

That in itself is already a protest of sorts.

We have enough elite and regular troops. And that we can mass teleport them anywhere in the Empire to wreak carnage instantly.

I didn't actually do it, but that's probably how people and law enforcement are taking it.

"The question is, how did the demons know that so many important people would be at a meeting of this branch of the Merchant's Guild on that day, at that hour?"

Information. Naturally, it's unlikely that most people knew such a meeting was taking place. But the demons knew, and they attacked.

That was because the Merchant Guild Master was a traitor, and it was the Imperials who carried out the raid. We can only assume that Shanapelle was in charge.

Where did the demons get their information?

"The last Crusader raid, and maybe it's just me, but the demons seem to know a lot of secret information."

That was thanks to Radia Schmidt's bullshit, but it was still important information. To the uninitiated, it's easy to think that demons know everything.

"So for now, I think it's best to find out why there were so many people in that Merchant's Guild branch, maybe there was an inside track."

What on earth was this meeting about that had brought so many people to this small southern merchant guild chapter?

Olivia was focused on that.

And then there's the leaker, who, although I can't quite put my finger on it, is closing in on Owen de Getmora.

The more Olivia said this, the more complicated my thoughts became.

Why the hell did Saviolin Tana send me here?

The Special Investigations Unit here was never set up to investigate, it was set up to obscure the truth. Not all investigators know the truth, but at least Scotra Kelton, the head of the unit, does.

The imperial instructions to him would naturally be to cover up the truth.

The Empire intervened to prevent the royal family of Levaina from investigating on their own.

The conspiracy to fabricate an imperial demon attack is not over, but it is still ongoing, as it will end the moment this division closes the case.

So no matter how the investigation goes, the end result will be that it was the work of demons. If the royal family of Levaina tries to intervene in the investigation, the Empire will use any excuse to prevent it, and Levaina has no reason to reject the Empire's personal attention.

This organization was set up to solve cases, but to do so at will. This conspiracy is riddled with suspicious circumstances, but once an agency closes a case, there can be no further investigation, so the final step in the conspiracy is to close the Special Branch's investigation.

But me and Olivia are different. We're the ones who have the power to deny the royal family access to Levaina, but they can't tell me or Olivia what to do.

A normal student would say, "Where are these kids going?" but Olivia is like that, and I'm like that, and I can't treat her like that.

Soon.

We could end up getting to the bottom of it, completely unaffected by their investigative guidelines or intentions. They can't tell us what to do.

"We've checked everything we need to check in the field, so let's go to the Merchant's Guild tomorrow."

"Yes, sir."

Why?

I don't care if me and Olivia ever find out the truth, is that it?

\* \* \*

Tomorrow, Olivia and I will visit the Merchant's Guild headquarters in Raziern.

It was late, so we decided to go to bed early, and Olivia and I went to our respective bedrooms.

But there's a strong possibility that she won't get anything out of it and will only raise suspicions. In that case, we don't know what Olivia's next move will be.

I know the truth, and I can find out as much as I want. I don't need to look anywhere else, I just need to go straight to the ecliptic and meet Owen de Getmora.

A very important meeting has taken place in the south, gathering such powerful people. Why were you, the Guildmaster, not present at such an important meeting?

If you start with something like that and start weaving Owen in, you might get him to admit the truth, but you might also get him to admit that he's suspicious enough to be caught.

Here's the thing.

A very large imperial conspiracy is to be uncovered by the Imperial Investigation Agency. That doesn't happen.

If Olivia ever found out the truth, she would get no credit. Rather, her hatred of humans would build and build.

So I don't want Olivia to find out the truth here, or to believe the fabricated truth.

That's why I'm curious about Savior Tana's thoughts. Why she sent me here to help Olivia, when it's clear that this place isn't dangerous.

You can add at least one to your resume. I helped investigate the location of the demon attack, that's all. Of course, being a member of the Special Investigation Unit for the Demon Attack is a pretty big resume, so it can't hurt.

It's a parachute career, so to speak. I can take any number of low-risk, high-reward positions, and my reputation builds as I go. The Empire doesn't want me to be dangerous, so I'm sure they'll want me to roam these places.

It's a little hard to avoid becoming a manufactured hero.

I'm lying in the bedroom of a royal family member and my mind is racing.

I think it's a good thing Olivia wasn't too hurt when she heard about the engagement.

I went out into the living room to get some water.

-black....... gray.......

Very low, sobbing cries came from Olivia's bedroom beyond the closed door.

Yes.

It can't be good.

In the first place, you're the only one crying.

The person who used to wear a smiling mask all the time, now wears an angry mask all the time.

Olivia's natural inclination to never let anyone see her struggle will never change.

This was hard for me to swallow, so I tried to trust what I saw.

Olivia laughs, even though I know she's always been that way.

I tried to believe he was actually smiling.

-Ugh....... ugh.......

What the heck should I have done.

I.

I couldn't tell anything.

-Eavesdropping on people crying, that's mean.

Of course, Olivia, whose senses are sharper than mine, heard me open the bedroom door and said so from the other side of the door.

-I know you can't come over and give me a hug, but you can give me a pat on the back, silly.

As I stood there, I could hear Olivia's pining from across the bedroom.

After wondering if I should go, I opened Olivia's bedroom door.

I was surprised that it wasn't locked as a matter of course.

When I walked into the bedroom, I found Olivia on the bed, wiping the corners of her eyes.

"I hope it's real, my eyes are shining."

Blindfolded, Olivia says, "I'm not sure.

"No what....... what?"

I can't do this, I can't do that. Olivia lowered the arm that covered her eyes.

I say poured, but honestly, I'm not sure.

In the darkness, I could just make out his slightly slit eyes in the moonlight streaming through the window.

"You're not going to marry me, are you?"

"......."

"You don't even have to say anything. I feel so bad for you."

With that, Olivia pushed herself up slightly and leaned her back against the wall behind the bed.

Olivia wasn't looking at me.

Pouting, Olivia stares out the moonlit window.

"I'm just going to marry the devil?"

"Is that ......?"

"Since you won't look out for me for the rest of my life, I'm going to marry the devil and then put a knife to your throat, you bastard."

Sister.......

It's true....... That's me too.......

\* \* \*

Olivia was joking, but that doesn't mean she wasn't serious. I don't know if she really wants to side with the Demon King. But I think she came to the Kingdom of Levaina because she wanted to know if the Demon King was truly as evil as the world perceived him to be.

Of course, I thought it was funny that she'd never seen a demon, and yet she was talking about marrying a demon as if it were a real thing. I mean, what if demons are genderless, dimorphic monsters?

......No.

I'm a little scared that Olivia will say what the hell does it matter if she's serious.

The next day.

"I don't know the details."

When Olivia and I arrived at the Merchant's Guild chapter in Levaina, we were able to get the story from the chapter leader.

"It would have been a major undertaking for the guild, but in those cases, we don't tend to share information with lower branches like this, just give them a venue. It's not that uncommon, so it's not like......."

From the look on his face, it was clear that he knew nothing about the Levaina Merchant Guild. Olivia stared at her, too, and then nodded.

"I see."

By the way she complied, I don't think Olivia was expecting to get any information from this.

Each of the dead was a major figure in the Empire, from all walks of life. And since the Merchant Guild's business was so important in the first place that information wasn't spread far and wide, Olivia didn't see much reason to doubt what the head of the Raziern Merchant Guild's branch was saying, and neither did I.

Olivia asked the branch manager a few more questions, but didn't get any significant leads.

But important.

That the Merchant Guild headquarters has ordered you to leave the branch empty because they will be using it for a specific period of time.

He was merely following the instructions of his headquarters in Raziern's branch.

"Let's get out of here, Reinhardt."

"Sure."

Olivia left Raziern's branch as if that was enough.

Outside the Merchant's Guild branch, Olivia pressed her index finger to her cheek and shook her head.

It's kind of pissing me off because she's trying to be cute and she's actually cute.

"It's kind of weird that the place was rented for a specific period of time, not a specific date......."

"The meeting could have been for multiple days, and even if it wasn't, you'd still have to clean up after them and take care of other things."

"Hmmm, that's true, I've never met anyone who wasn't a farting mess."

Olivia would have had quite a few meetings with people in high places, even if not now. So it makes sense to me that they would order her to leave for a period of time, not just a specific date.

"There were quite a few priests like that."

"......Priests, too?"

"Yeah, I've heard of some high priests who insist that their prayer space be exactly how they want it, and they drive around in a huge carriage decorated as a chapel. I've heard of some who insist that their sermons aren't for the common people, and they won't let anyone below the rank of ordained priest hear them. There are some people who think they're two or three levels above where everyone else sees them. It's kind of like they deify themselves, which is kind of funny."

The sneer that remained in her ponytail reflected Olivia's contempt for humans.

"Low is low, high is high, and I'm ugly in my own way."

The ugliness that comes from ignorance and lowliness, and the ugliness that comes from knowledge and honor.

Humans are ugly, Olivia seemed to think.

"In that sense, my foster father was a good priest, because he had integrity. It's just that he was crazy."

As disappointed as he was with everyone in the world, he felt that his adoptive father was still a madman who followed his convictions, which was better than most.

Levereer Ranze sought to break away from the Empire and establish the Empire of the Five Great Houses, and with his first great success, he attempted to install Olivia.

It was only as he lay dying that he realized that the gods had never chosen him, and he accepted death. He understood that by killing him, he had earned Tuan's judgment, for he was Tuan's champion.

Olivia looked off into the distance and smiled bitterly.

"That's useless, let's go back to the ecliptic for now. The Merchant Guild Master might know something."

"......Yes."

I knew who to turn to because I knew the truth, but Olivia's thoughts naturally drifted there as well.

Is it really okay for Olivia to see Owen?

If Olivia knew the truth, she would inevitably be in danger. Olivia is an unknown, but she is a champion of Tuan, just like me. But the Empire doesn't know that.

I'll be okay, but will Olivia be okay? But an empire short of people will not want to sacrifice Olivia, who is far stronger than me or Ellen at this point. Especially if they realize that she shares Tiamata with me.

With that thought in mind, I head for the warp gate in Raziern.

-It's their fault!

-They brought the demons!

-Kill! Kill!

There was a commotion in a square in Raziern.

"What's going on?"

"Sure."

It was crowded, and people were being pushed and shoved by the guards.

-Kill the Satanists!

-Kill the infidel!

-Fetch the inquisitor!

"Demon religion......?"

Olivia's expression hardened, and so did mine.

The word I'd long forgotten, but was clearly in the back of my mind.

Demonology.

The name was echoing through the center of Raziern.

\* \* \*

In the middle of the square in Raziern, someone was being mobbed by a cultist.

-Get away! I said get away!

The man who appeared to be in charge of the guard was cursing, but the angry crowd was cursing back and trying to push the guard away. Olivia and I could see people sprawled out on the ground inside the circle of people the guards had formed.

There was nothing in their demeanor that identified them as Satanists because I don't know what Satanists are in the first place.

They just looked like normal people. Young men, women, old men. There were even children.

No matter how you looked at it, they seemed to be just normal people.

-Soon, the Inquisitor of the Five Great Houses will take the proper steps to determine whether or not they are demonists! Those who use private means will be severely punished according to the laws of Levaina!

-How many people have heard them get together and talk about the devil!

-What the hell is a bunch of housebound bastards worshipping a strange idol if not Satanism!

-Kill him! Kill him! He'll come back for more!

-If they bring the demon back to Raziern, you'll be responsible!

Olivia's expression hardened as she looked at the crowd.

"Something happened that you don't understand, so you decided to hate the people around you that you do understand."

"......."

"Isn't that funny, Reinhardt?"

Olivia smiles at me.

"It's the demons who killed the people, and the humans are trying to solve something by killing the humans."

I wonder if the Olivia of old would have helped those persecuted.

They may or may not be Satanists.

However, an event begets many events.

The people of Raziern, the capital of the Kingdom of Levaina, don't trust the investigators sent by the Empire; they trust their instincts.

-They're going to bring the demons back!

The Devil has no reason or justification to answer their call, even if they are indeed Satanists.

How in the world can you lowly creatures, not unlike yourselves, summon a demon to this small town?

But people believe it.

To believe it.

-Oh, look down upon us, O Great God.......

They believe they are doing good because they think killing them is justice.

As such, there seemed to be little awareness that this was murder.

Olivia was laughing at the humans.

I didn't want to laugh at the sight, to be disgusted by it.

"That's sad."

Olivia smirks in surprise at my comment.

"I'm surprised, Reinhardt. You have such humanity."

"Life is too good to be precious."

"....... I guess."

For a moment, I wondered if the devil and the saint had gotten their words backwards.

Olivia stopped laughing at the horrible sight at my words.

"Let's go. This is unpleasant."

However, he didn't seem to have the slightest inclination to intervene in the spectacle.

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While investigating the manipulated truth, Olivia and I discovered something else.

The people of Raziern, the capital of the Kingdom of Levaina, have been shaken to their core by the shock of a demon attack.

The demons have vanished without a trace, but the demon raids are still here.

They don't know why the demon has attacked Raziern, so they try to find a reason. They don't believe the royal announcement, they don't believe the imperial announcement, they are suspicious of their usual suspects, and they accuse them of demonism.

The reason will usually be trivial.

Always walking around with a sullen look on their face and saying unintelligible things.

You don't socialize well and are a homebody.

You see an unidentified statue in your house and accuse you of being an idolater.

It's probably not the most obvious reason.

In extreme cases, a non-universal human being will be branded as unpleasant, and people will try to make that person deserving of disgust because they don't want to admit that they are unpleasant. This is probably a good thing.

We want someone to be someone who deserves to die, so we make it happen.

Neither Olivia nor I intervened on the scene.

The scene is not under Imperial jurisdiction. The Empire is investigating the demon attack, but that's as far as it goes, and that's as far as my role and Olivia's role goes.

It would be trespassing to interfere in the affairs of the royal family of the Second Empire. And such matters of politics are neither my forte nor my duty. Furthermore, I am not imperial, but I bear the imperial crest, so if I act imprudently, it is the imperial family that will suffer, not me.

I'm a beggar, nominally enrolled in a temple, and I'm thinking about the power of the imperial family and the empire, and I'm actually a demon.

I couldn't help but laugh.

I ask them when they've been to Raziern and we head straight back to the Zodiacal Gradient. The fact that I'm participating in a special activity must have been relayed to the kids by either Mr. Eppinhauser or Savior Tana, so they're not worried about me.

No, you're worried that he might have gone off to do something dangerous.

"Nice imperial crest, by the way, and it gives me direct access to the warp gate. Shall I say I'm a champion of Tuan and ask for one?"

I'd even go so far as to say that it was convenient that Olivia was able to return to the ecliptic immediately.

"Then the Tuan Sect will come to you twenty times a day to tell you that you should live in the arms of the gods, and you'll be fine with that?"

"Ugh, that's true. I suppose I could tell the imperial family, but I'm just saying, I don't want anyone to bother me more."

As we head to the Merchant Guild headquarters in the ecliptic, Olivia stares at me.

"But Reinhardt."

"Yes."

"Do you remember me and the tournament final......."

Radia Schmidt.

I almost lost control of my facial expression at the sudden mention, but I didn't make a weird face.

"Yes, I remember you, Radia Schmidt."

"By any chance, have you seen him since we ran into each other?"

Radia Schmidt was talking crap to Olivia. I told her to leave Olivia alone while talking back to her.

Afterward, Radia Schmidt followed me with the intention of killing me, and Elise subdued her. The information I gained from her allowed me to save Adriana and Olivia.

"No. Why? Come to think of it, I don't think I've seen it in the temple either."

Olivia's expression darkened at my words.

"He's been missing....... since that day."

Despite being disillusioned with the faith and disgusted with those who enforce it, Olivia seems to have a place in her heart as a friend.

We don't have to tell each other what the day is, we just know.

"...... Was he a part of that?"

Olivia lifts her head and looks up at the sky.

"Maybe....... I didn't see it there, of course, but we don't really know who the hell was there, and we don't have a good list of Crusader deaths....... Maybe there......."

Olivia seemed to think that Radia Schmidt was not missing, but had died in a demon attack.

If so, the story would be that the devil saved himself and killed my friend.

"It's not like Radia's body has been found....... I wasn't sure, but with this lack of news......."

Olivia seemed to think Radia's chances of survival were very slim. It seemed the Raziern attack wasn't the only reason she needed reassurance about the demon.

Although chronologically a Temple graduate, Radia Schmidt never graduated and went missing. For reasons I don't know, Temple may have been looking for her whereabouts and may have concluded that she was already dead because of the connection to the Crusader raid.

What the heck is going on with Radia Schmidt at Epiax?

I'm sure Elise can handle it.

\* \* \*

-Whoooooooo

High Epiaxis.

Radia sat in one part of the kitchen, idly watching as sliced vegetables and meat sautéed in a pan of oil, and a pot of stew simmered in another.

"I've noticed before that....... You're a good cook."

Radia swallowed her words carefully, knowing she didn't need to eat.

"If you live long enough, you learn to do things, even if they're the last thing you need."

Eleris sat beside Radia as she cooked, not lifting a finger. She was cooking three dishes at once, all with telekinetic power, so Radia watched helplessly as the ingredients were sliced from thin air into the jars and the fire in the pans was magically controlled.

Radia doesn't realize how difficult this is, but she just stares in wonder.

The shop the demon prince frequented had no utensils, so she couldn't feed him, but when she took charge of Radia's life in Epiax, Eleris brought in household items.

So I've been taking care of them so that they can eat and sleep even though they're lonely.

Radia sees the vampire staring out the window, chin in hand, not even looking at the cooking process.

We've been together for a few months now.

Despite her first impression, Radia realizes that this vampire is only strangely friendly.

I expected him to brainwash me, to modify my mind to favor the demonic forces, but he never said it.

He just wants to take care of himself, he doesn't want anything. She didn't ask for anything, and when she got bored, we would just talk and share ordinary stories. What life was like in the temple, how she came to faith. These personal stories became part of Radia's life.

Even Radia Schmidt admits it now.

You no longer feel any animosity toward the vampire, who is very powerful and kind to you.

No, every last bit of fear, every last bit of embarrassment about even being an enemy, was gone.

It's lonely in this cold, barren castle, but the vampire's hot meals are always on time. He says it would be lonely to eat alone, so he watches over her, never taking a bite himself.

If he seems to be enjoying himself, he'll even give you a big smile.

This vampire is nothing to be afraid of.

When you've gotten good enough at cooking something that's inferior to you to the point where you don't even have to look at it with a telekinetic eye.

If you're this good, you're not doing it for yourself, you're doing it for others.

Someone who cares enough about you that they don't want you to stay in the cold and always cook you something hot to warm you up.

There was no way this thing could be dangerous, Radia had come to realize.

Bowls of warm stir-fries and stews are served to her, and, as always, she sips carefully, savoring the warming flavors.

"Eleris, why did you become a vampire?"

"Hmmm. Why do you want to know that?"

"Just......."

Eleris looks at Radia and gives her a coy smile.

"I don't want to die."

There was no grain of truth in that oversimplification of the past.

"I'm too angry, frustrated, and sad to die this way."

But there was a grain of truth in her subsequent self-help words.

"So I did."

Radia stares at Eleris' complicated expression, which doesn't explain everything in the end.

"But you know what, if you live too long, time dulls everything."

"......."

"No anger, no sorrow, no hatred, no wind, they've all become dull, and in the end I want nothing."

Being without craving.

Radia doesn't know what kind of abject hatred she had in her past, but she senses that Elise is weathered.

"Then....... You're loyal to the devil, for what reason......?"

"Hmmm......."

The smile fades from Eleris's face, and only sadness remains.

"Because there's no wind, but there's work to be done....... because there is something to watch....... must be done."

Elise looks at Radia.

"I'm sorry, I don't have a past to brag about."

"Oh, no, that....... Thanks....... for telling me."

"I'm grateful. It must be lonely in a place like this, and you don't even complain......."

Elise stares out the window at the snow falling, while Radia eats the food Elise has prepared.

Radia had no family.

Raised in an orphanage, he excelled in divine powers, joined the Order of Als, and began reading sermons and scriptures to become a priest.

Radia reflects on her life now that she has fallen away from her faith.

How I came to serve Als and how I came to believe.

I was convinced that I was the chosen one. Unlike other orphans, I was gifted with divine powers, so I was treated specially.

Different foods were placed on the table for her and the other children.

When I tried to share it, I was scolded.

Teachers and priests have always told me to take it for granted, to take it for granted, that I've been chosen by God, that I deserve that special treatment, that it's not given to me by the director of the orphanage, that it's given to me by God, and only you can take it.

Radia believed she was special, and she dug into her faith to affirm that.

Just as it was natural for those lesser than you to be treated less than you. They took it for granted that children who were more talented than the gods were treated with more respect than they were. They thought they had to work harder to be treated better than them.

Talent, power, and a price.

It was a fact of life for Radia.

The one who proved it deserved the one who proved it. That was Radia's truth, and so even if Olivia, who was better than anyone else, had everything in the world, Radia thought she deserved it. Olivia's rejection of it was a sin in itself.

But now.

Olivia eats a hot meal prepared by someone who wants nothing from her. He doesn't want anything from her, doesn't force her to study or pray, but he always asks if she's okay and suggests that we get out of this cold place once in a while and take a walk somewhere nice and fresh.

Though you want nothing from me.

It wants to do anything for me.

"......."

Radia realizes.

I never had a family.

This is what family looks like.

It's the kind of relationship where you don't want anything from each other, but you care about each other more than anyone else.

I guess that's family.

I know she won't consider herself family.

But Radia, who had never experienced such warmth before, was confused.

The process of coming to believe in God required a lot of things, and there was a price to pay. I had to live a better life, read scripture, pray, and study what God claims and seeks.

To believe in God, you had to know God, and the world around you demanded and expected you to know God.

But now.

Radia believes that Elise is harmless to her.

But Radia still doesn't know who Elyse is, and Elyse hasn't told her anything about herself.

I was just there. During that time, Elise's words, actions, and small gestures of caring for herself accumulated and accumulated.

Radia Schmidt came to believe in Eleris.

Belief in a different sense than faith.

For the first time, Radia was feeling it in a being that wasn't even human.

Radia knows something about Elise.

That there are road vampires, and that there are seven families of road vampires, and that this is a place where they gather from time to time.

And Elise, the Gazoo of Tuesday.

You are the master of the house, but there are no other vampires in the house.

Radia knows that much now.

We have before us a being who directly denies the teachings of the Great Master, who taught that all beings are evil.

Radia couldn't find even a hint of evil in Eleris' features.

God.

We've been teaching the wrong thing.

If you don't believe in the goodness and kindness right in front of you, what else is there in the world to believe in?

For Radia Schmidt, that distrust had been brewing for a while.

God might be wrong.

Because.

For Radia Schmidt, the first time she experienced this kind of warmth, something inside her broke.

No, maybe that's not the right way to describe it.

is also a map in cold places.

In this chilly castle where everything is frozen.

Maybe something has melted away.

\* \* \*

Zodiacal Gradient, Merchant Guild Headquarters.

"The Guildmaster is currently unavailable."

My request for an interview with Olivia was met with a predictable response. It's entirely possible that there were discussions beforehand. Like, if Olivia Lanchester comes to visit, don't meet her.

"And when will you be back?"

"We don't know the exact timeline either. We only know that you've been very busy lately with some major business matters within the guild, and it could be a few days before you return, or it could be over a week before you return......."

If Owen de Getmora is intentionally avoiding meeting Olivia, then Olivia will never see him again.

Of course, Olivia has no way of knowing that this is an imperial stunt, so it's hard for her to realize that information is being deliberately withheld and that she's being deliberately kept from meeting key players in the case.

Olivia and I were eventually forced to leave the Merchant Guild headquarters without meeting the all-important Owen.

If he's not meeting you on purpose, that's the best thing you can do. You can make up a perfect excuse when you do meet, but it's best not to have the conversation at all. At this point, you won't be under suspicion.

"That's refreshing......."

I've traveled all the way to the southern kingdom of Levaina and back to the Yellow Road, but I still can't find my guildmaster.

"I think I'll have to choose between going back to Lazierne and doing some more research, or waiting for the Guildmaster to return."

I was actually glad that Owen wasn't around. If Olivia ever got to the bottom of it, she might actually go beyond her disillusionment with humans and join the Devil's side. If it weren't for me, she might actually join the Devil's side, even if it was only in jest.

Olivia said she needed to be convinced.

It doesn't say what kind of conviction it is. Whether it's a conviction to hate demons or humans.

When Olivia learns the truth about what happened, she will be convinced that she hates humans.

If I were the devil and I was found out, I'd be fine, but Olivia's siding with the devil in this situation is like crawling into a fire.

"Let's go back to Raziern."

"Do you think so?"

So I wanted to avoid any situation where Olivia might run into Owen.

\* \* \*

The distance itself is huge, but with the warp gate, getting there and back was a snap.

The trip back to the ecliptic and then back to the field, to Raziern, was just as quick.

"I always feel like, how the hell are people going to live without warp gates......."

Olivia started to say something about the convenience of the warp gate, but then shut up.

And it was the same for me.

Olivia narrowed her eyes at the spot in the plaza where the warp gate was located.

The time it took us to leave Raziern, stop by the Merchant Guild headquarters, and return was about three hours. Even with the warp gate, we still had time to actually get to the Merchant Guild headquarters.

So, we were back in Lazerne in three hours.

"What is....... this?"

Olivia mutters in a shaky voice.

In just three hours.

-Burn! Burn the infidels!

People who had been accused of being satanists were hanging from poles.

Episode 399.

Some people were accused of witchcraft.

The crowd was furious, and the guards stood in the way of the angry crowd, telling them not to impose private sanctions.

What happened in the three hours we were gone. They had all been executed.

It's not a small town, it's not even a small country, it's the capital of a country, and it's in a public square with a warp gate.

Those who had been accused of being satanists were dead, and the angry mob was screaming for their bodies to be burned.

We don't know if the Inquisitor arrived, branded them as heretics and executed them, or if the guards stepped in and hanged them.

However, this execution happened so quickly that it's unlikely it was done properly.

"It's crazy....... People are all......."

I knew something terrible would happen, but I didn't think it would go so far as to kill a man without a proper trial, so Olivia seemed to feel horror beyond disgust and contempt.

Fear is similar to anger.

Fear of the devil, then, becomes anger at one's neighbors and a search for scapegoats.

Olivia turned away from the gruesome execution and the angry crowd as she walked toward the investigation center.

"What the hell is the Royal House of Leviathan or the Order of the Giver doing?"

"......."

I couldn't say anything.

"No way, are you doing this on purpose?"

The royal family and the church did not do nothing. On the contrary, they may have enforced the situation.

You might say that they're just regular folks, not Satanists. The crowd might believe it, or they might not.

But if the scapegoat is not executed, the rage and fear will not subside. Indeed, whether or not they're actually Satanists, the anger is only temporarily quelled by their death.

The scapegoat was executed unusually quickly to give the crowd a sense that something had been resolved.

If an angry crowd becomes a mob, there will be great chaos. Releasing people who people suspect of being Satanists would in itself further inflame the crowd's anger.

Innocent people were killed to control the situation.

Olivia read between the lines.

Getting to the bottom of it is not the point.

Already, it was clear that this aimless violence of the panicked crowds in the aftermath of the demon attack would play a role in Olivia's hatred of humans.

\* \* \*

"Are you going to leave this alone?"

Back at the Special Investigations Unit, Olivia asked Scotra Kelton, the head of the unit.

The middle-aged knight with the calm expression seemed to understand what Olivia was talking about.

"Ms. Olivia, I'm sure you know what you're talking about."

"I know this could be interference in internal affairs, and I know the Bureau doesn't have that kind of authority, but....... This is......."

No matter how disillusioned Olivia is with humans, she hasn't become someone who agrees to kill them indiscriminately.

"I realize that if left unchecked, this situation could turn into a massive riot, an indiscriminate hunt for infidels, but we're here to investigate the events of the demon raids, not to influence the internal affairs of the Kingdom of Levaina. We can't do anything else."

Olivia is not stupid. Of course she knows what Kelton is talking about.

But it's frustrating to see the insanity of heresy trials and hanging people in front of our eyes, and to know that this trend could continue for a while, or even turn into a riot, and not do anything about it.

However, special editions need to be operated within reason, and what's happening in Lazerne right now is clearly off-base.

So Olivia knows she's pushing Scotra Kelton's buttons.

But we can't leave this situation alone.

Olivia has enough humanity left in her to think like that.

"Of course, a few words of concern about the situation, even from someone like Levaina without special privileges, could have a significant impact."

Third in command of Shanapelle. That's already a good position for a king of a small country. Even now, he takes orders from the Empire and is in charge of field command. It's a bit of an interference in his internal affairs, but he doesn't mind.

"But the very act of me doing that would constitute interference in the internal affairs of an already sovereign state, so it wouldn't be Levaina that matters."

"The other empires....... other empires?"

"Yes."

You can interfere in the internal affairs of a Levaina. However, it can be very uncomfortable for other empires to know that you have interfered in their internal affairs. Even if it's a small country's sovereignty, it's still a violation of the sovereignty of an empire.

While all countries are part of an empire, an empire is ultimately a federation of many countries. Some empires are self-governing, such as the Ecliptic, but their vassal states have their own laws and sovereignty.

Worse, in this case, the Imperial investigators who have come to investigate the case are acting outside of their purpose, interfering in internal affairs.

Scotra Kelton's position was that there was too much at stake to take a stand, no matter how bad it was, and Olivia and I both understood that.

"Also, I don't think it's such a bad idea either. Throwing the truth at an angry crowd will only make them more angry. Sure, a few innocent people will die, but it'll blow over."

Scotra Kelton reads the report and makes a mark somewhere, rolling her pen as she goes.

He's right.

Letting scapegoaters know that they are innocent will only make them find another scapegoat or make them more angry. Anger needs to be resolved, even if the cause is wrong.

You can riot and face chaos, or you can find a scapegoat, kill a few, and settle down.

The Royal House of Levaina and the Cult have chosen a different path. Olivia stared at Scotra Kelton, who rolled her nib absentmindedly.

Rather than resenting his cold conclusion, Olivia seemed frustrated that she couldn't find an answer herself.

"Of course, I'm not authorized, but there is one person who is authorized to interfere in my internal affairs......."

He looks at me sheepishly.

"Mr. Reinhardt."

"It's ......."

"If you claim to be here as an agent of the imperial family, perhaps you could discuss the appropriate course of action with the House of Levaina."

"......I thought you said it was internal affairs interference?"

"That's assuming you're willing to take it. I have no intention of doing so, but Mr. Reinhardt may feel differently. He is not under my command, is he?"

You're a knight, but I'm semi-imperial with an imperial crest.

If the head of the Investigations Division talks to the royal family of Levaina, that's not part of the investigation, but if an imperial agent contacts the royal family and talks to them, that's part of the investigation. Of course, that's interference in internal affairs, but it's perfectly acceptable to talk to the royal family of Levaina.

However, in that case, not only will I be responsible for anything that happens because I ran my mouth, but so will the Imperial Family.

The Imperial Coat of Arms is more than just priority access to the warp gate.

It made sense to me why this would never be given away to anyone.

Why did Tana send me here.

I'm starting to get the picture.

If I could stabilize the chaotic situation in Leviathan, I would do so.

It wasn't life-threatening, but it would be an accomplishment if he succeeded.

It doesn't have to be a solution. Maybe it's to see how I react in the face of a big problem, not a small one.

But how?

No.

By the way, Empire, these assholes are pissing me off.

If you think about it, you're creating terrorism in a small southern country, and then when it comes to the aftermath, you're like, "I don't know," right?

Isn't that a situation where you're accusing the devil, and then you're asking me, the devil, to clean up that shit?

\* \* \*

The Levainese capital, Raziern, was currently experiencing the aftermath of a demon raid: people were being driven mad by fear of demons.

The result is a method of extermination. Of course, it's mostly innocent people who have nothing to do with the cult who are actually hunted down and killed.

Knowing that they were innocent, the royal family and the Church seemed intent on sacrificing them to quell the outrage.

The devil was never in this place in the first place.

After all, it's only because Leviathan is a small country in the south that the Empire has sent revolutionary forces to kill it. Moreover, the Investigative Division is only thinking of covering up the incident, and the aftermath of the incident is unknown to me, as it could be considered interference in internal affairs.

It's an age-old truth that the horrors of the ruling class are unfathomable, but it's even more eerie now that it's so tangible.

The empire that created this situation and is sitting on its hands is terrible.

I'm horrified by the Levaina royal family and the Order of the Five Great Givers, who hang innocent victims to stabilize the situation.

It's also terrible to see a crowd that turns fear into anger and looks for a scapegoat, even when they know it's not going to happen.

"Hell wasn't anywhere else."

Guest room.

Olivia stood by the window, muttering grimly to herself as she listened to the distant shouts of the crowd.

In the days of the Demon Realm, fights were fought in specific areas of the Demon Realm, so the fights, battles, blood, and slaughter only happened there.

But now that the demonic world is gone, demons can infiltrate the human world, appearing and disappearing out of nowhere.

So people were being driven mad by the fear of an insubstantial enemy, the fear that they might be living and breathing near them.

So when they couldn't find an enemy in the form of a demon, they looked within for an enemy in the form of a human, and that was the Demon God. But even the demons were not here, so they could only suspect each other and hate each other.

"What are you going to do, Reinhard?"

At the moment, I'm the only one who makes less noise and has access to the royal family of Levaina. I could report this to the imperial court, but the general manager, a knight of Shanapelle, said I should just leave it alone.

Whether it's Charlotte, the Emperor, or Bertus, if they hear about this, they're going to tell you to leave them alone.

What am I different?

If you tell the scapegoaters that this person is not a Satanist, they won't believe you, and even if they do, they'll find other ways to vent their anger.

I suppose there's the option of banning private infidelity and imposing martial law to control the population.

But if an angry crowd starts a riot, that's an even bigger disaster. The riot could overthrow the royal family, and if you have to beat the crowd to quell the riot, that's a disaster, too.

It's a shame.

Scotra Kelton was right when she said that the least bloodshed is when innocent people are dying and things are quiet.

"Unless there's a real Satanist and they get caught or something, or the devil dies....... I don't know how to solve this without seeing blood."

I'm not exactly a genius, and politics is not my strong suit.

If I were to meet with King Levaina and do something presumptuous, what would I say? There's no way I'd have a pointed number.

Olivia stood at the window, staring down at the street.

She had grown to hate humans, but she couldn't sit back and watch innocent people die; she couldn't help but wonder if that nature would eventually go away somewhere.

"This is what happens when people are eaten by despair......."

It's not like I'm sure it's going to come back, and it didn't really do that much damage.

But the fear is not real, and it spreads among people.

The fear of the devil's name is circulated and reproduced among people, inflating it to insubstantial size.

It is, after all, a belief, just not called by that name. It's like when people who don't know about God say what God is like, and it becomes a common concept.

A belief in the name of the Devil is created among the people.

None of what they say looks like me, but people add flesh to the nebulous entity that is the devil, molding it into a shape of terror.

A new faith called the Devil, whose beliefs inspire nothing but fear and despair.

-Hunt down the Satanists!

It's probably all over the continent right now.

Raziern is overkill, but with demons nowhere to be found across the continent, people will turn to their human-formed enemies, the Demonists.

This is just the beginning.

A massive manhunt will be launched to identify and hunt down the cultists.

-Believe in Artorius!

-The hero will rise and defeat the devil!

And then, out of the blue.

Olivia looked from the window to my direction and cocked her head.

"......?"

"......?"

What did I just hear?

-The warrior Artorius will protect us!

"Are you sure I didn't hear you wrong, I thought you said Artorius?"

"Yeah....... That....... like that?"

No.

What kind of bullshit is this?

\* \* \*

I thought I could understand people yelling at me about banishing Satanism, but Olivia and I heard something even more outlandish.

Trust Artorius?

Olivia and I immediately ran out into the street and grabbed the person screaming at us.

"Excuse me."

"Artorius will save us......!"

It was an elderly man who was shouting such bizarre things.

"What's going on?"

"What are you talking about? Trust Artorius?"

"You, too, can be saved by believing in the Champion......, and you need not fear the devil at all!"

He exclaimed, his face full of faith and belief. Olivia was puzzled, and so was I.

"No, Artorius is not that....... demon and....... died, didn't he?"

He shook his head at my stammering.

"Oh, you young man, you don't know what you're talking about! Arcturus is not dead, he's ascended! He's done great things like defeating demons and becoming a god ......! Yes, he's become a god, and now that the demons are back, it's only fitting that Arcturus should return to finish the job he started!"

No.

"You, too, believe in the Champion and wait for the salvation to come......!"

What the hell is this?

The old man turned away from us, frozen, and began to chant.

-Believe in Artorius!

-The time of salvation is at hand!

-Do not be afraid, for the warrior is coming!

Staring at the old man's back as he walked away, Olivia and I made eye contact.

"What is martial arts?"

"How do I know that......."

Things like demon hunting and stuff like that were still in the realm of possibility.

The emergence of an emerging religion that worships Lagan Artorius was so unexpected that it left us frozen in place.

400

"What is this....... What is this......."

"So......."

Back in the guest room, we were both frozen.

The five major Shinto religions basically believe in a deity that exists. Of course, most people don't realize that these gods have two sides to them, and there are holy objects that symbolize their power.

After all, there are priests in the world who believe in a god who lends them power.

But there's no way that's possible with this bullshit warrior religion.

Rather, something akin to the religion of my home world had suddenly arisen.

Belief in something that does not exist.

Just as the hunt for demons was born out of fear, so too was the warrior religion born out of fear. Olivia looked incredulous.

"Lagan Artorius didn't die, he ascended and became a god, or something, how does that make sense?"

"If you want to believe that, you'll believe that, just like you'll accuse anyone who isn't a Satanist of being a Satanist no matter how you look at it."

Of course, none of this happened in the original.

But last year, signs of the Devil's return began to emerge, and people began to panic, wondering who would kill the Devil if there were no warriors.

That fear has morphed into a strange belief that Artorius will rise from the dead and destroy the demon.

"Is there such a thing as a denomination? Someone organized to spread it?"

"Well....... Rather, there are folk beliefs in different parts of the world, though most of them died out a long time ago....... Maybe that kind of folklore?"

When times are strange, cults thrive.

Instead of a revival of demonism, however, we have a warrior religion that believes in warriors. If it were a folk religion, it would have no core, and it would spread like wildfire as the fear of demons spread.

"Seriously....... I don't know what the hell is going on anymore."

Olivia doesn't believe that God doesn't exist because she's abandoned the five major religions. People are in a panic, some are trying to kill their neighbors, and others are spreading false hope by worshipping a god who is already dead.

Here's the thing.

"But isn't that martial religion....... Isn't it a heresy after all?"

A folk belief in the god Artorius, who became a godless man.

They believe in Lagan Artorius, who slayed the demon himself, not the Five Great Gods.

But not only does it not work, but that kind of faith is basically heresy. It's even worse when it's taken to mean that demons exist in the first place but shouldn't be believed in.

Olivia chews her lip at my words.

"Yes....... Of course it's heresy......."

Olivia looks out the window.

The chaos and panic of the crowd made it hard to see anything but the roof of the building, but the atmosphere was palpable.

"But....... Wouldn't denying the Godhead of Artorius now be....... Wouldn't that be dangerous for the Church of the Lord......?"

In the original story, Artorius' name is mentioned on the same level as a god.

But that was about humanity's absolute trust and adoration of Artorius, not that he was actually worshipped.

Under the special circumstances of the demon's return, a cult of warriors began to arise. With the crowds driven mad by the terror of the demon, people developed a bizarre belief that Ragan would rise from the dead and defeat the demon.

Who would put a knife to their throats for worshipping a heretic.

You don't believe in Artorius?

Don't you believe in a warrior who killed a demon?

Wouldn't it be nice if Artorius was resurrected?

Why do I think it shouldn't?

No, but why are you gritting your teeth and saying that Artorius can't be resurrected?

This asshole?

You deny through clenched teeth that the savior of mankind will rise again.

You don't want Artorius to be resurrected, do you?

Why do I hate that?

a.......

Right.

Right.

You're a traitor to humanity.

This kind of crazy reverse inquisition is actually possible.

Some people look for a scapegoat to ease their fears, while others start believing in a new absolute to ease their fears.

Lagan Artorius is not a god.

If you say something like that, can you get away with it without having your head blown off?

\* \* \*

A new faith in warriors is spreading. At this point, we don't know if it's a core belief or if it's just a folklore that's spreading, but we suspect it's the latter.

"Even if believing in the second coming of Artorius is fiction, it's still a lot better than this pagan drivel."

"I suppose so."

I couldn't agree more with Olivia's statement. It's the difference between overcoming fear with anger and overcoming it with hope.

Spreading hope by believing in the resurrection of warriors isn't going to kill anyone, and the friction with the Five Great Houses that will arise from the spread of this religion could be even more costly, but that's not what's happening at this point.

Whatever the substance of the Lagan Artorius faith, the important thing is that it tries to instill in people a sense of not being afraid of the Devil.

Confusion subsides as people believe in the return of the warrior.

What matters.

In the end, it's not so much about the Artorian faith as it is about instilling faith that the demon will be defeated.

Why Saviolin Tana sent me here.

That would have meant stabilizing the chaotic situation in Leviathan.

And the method was, when you think about it, ridiculously simple.

"If I show people that I have an Alsbringer, this mess will go away, right?"

"That would be......?"

People wanted someone to fight the devil, so they hoped for the resurrection of the dead Lagan Artorius.

The key is not Artorius, but someone who will defeat the devil.

Fear of the devil is neutralized by instilling hope that the devil will be defeated.

A holy relic of the War God that belonged to Ragan Artorius after he defeated the Champion.

The people will be reassured by simply recognizing the existence of a nation chosen by Alsbringer and its holy object. A warrior has risen to defeat the demon.

In the chaos of a fake demon attack, Levaina was the perfect place for a second warrior to emerge.

\* \* \*

I have decided to announce to the world that I am the master of Alsbringer. The Imperials don't want me to be dangerous, but they do want me to be famous.

The turbulent Levainian capital of Raziern was a fitting place to announce the arrival of a new master of Alsbringer. The panicked inhabitants begin to hunt down the pagans, and their belief in the resurrection of Artorius begins to bubble to the surface.

So I'm going to show them Alsbringer, and I'm going to tell them I'm going to defeat the devil, and they're going to go home and wipe their feet and get some sleep, and the chaos will be over, and I'll be famous.

Nothing dangerous, just a few swings of the sword and you're done. So Raziern was a very appropriate place to make my debut.

"Are you sure that's okay? It's very....... dangerous."

Olivia seemed concerned about me.

The Alsbringer would be anathema to the current demon, and if it were to target me, I would be in danger.

"You'll be fine."

I can't explain why that's okay, but Olivia must have read something in my stony expression, because she nodded with a determined look.

"Yeah, well, it's your decision, and there's nothing I can do about it."

With that, Olivia put her hands on both my shoulders.

"You, I will protect."

We never got to the bottom of the demon attack, but my arrival seems to have shifted Olivia's focus. I don't know if Saviolin Tana or the Imperium had this in mind, but for now, Olivia seems to be more concerned with protecting me once it's public knowledge that I'm the master of Alsbringer than investigating the truth.

I'm doing this because I'm important, after all.

Thank you for that.

"......Thanks."

Also, I had to apologize.

"Kisses then!"

-side!

"Oh, I told you not to do that!"

Not yet, but I'm pregnant, so don't do this!

\* \* \*

Olivia and I stepped out onto the streets of Raziern. It was already nighttime.

The streets were chaotic.

While some were talking about the resurrection of the warrior, others were roaming the streets with torches as if they were vigilantes.

Even if you're not trying to find out if they're a cultist, you're too anxious to stay still.

Unless you inject them with a neuroleptic named Warrior, they're going to have sleepless nights and be suspicious of their neighbors.

We don't know if Alsbringer's new owners will bring them back to a restful night's sleep, but we do know that things will be better than they are now.

A demon wields Alsbringer in front of a crowd hoping for someone to die for them instead, proclaiming that I will protect you.

It would have been ridiculous to imagine.

A warrior is a clown, after all. It's kind of noble in that it gives hope instead of laughter, but I'm not a real warrior, so I'm still a clown.

"Let's go to the square."

"Yes."

"Give me a mask, or something like that."

"Blink?"

"Yes......."

I was too embarrassed to elaborate, but Olivia smiled broadly as if she understood.

If I'm going to be a clown, I might as well do it right. I don't have that ability, but Olivia should be able to give you the visual effect of a glow emanating from me.

A warrior (possibly a demon) who appears to save the crowd from being consumed by light.

I'm giddy just thinking about it.

It's best to show up in the most populated areas, so Olivia and I headed to the main square of Raziern, where the warp gate is located.

The closer we got to the square, the worse both Olivia and I looked.

"That's an increase......."

True to Olivia's word, there were more poles in the square, and more dead people hanging from them.

I don't know where the crazed crowd finds their scapegoats, but it seemed like there were still more people to kill.

In the roaring crowd, guards and men in priestly garb were chattering eagerly about whether they were about to hang someone in the street.

Knowing that the dying are not infidels, they are willing to kill the innocent to anesthetize the crowd.

"A person....... I'm so scared......."

Olivia's complexion was turning blue. She wondered if it was worth the risk to save such ignorant people. Olivia wondered if she was thinking about that.

It's to prevent senseless deaths, but more importantly, it's for Charlotte's sake.

As we got closer and closer to the square, the angry crowd became more visible.

It was little more than noise, with people screaming at the top of their lungs at the sight of the hanging bodies, praying, and shouting at the top of their lungs to believe in Artorius.

"Reinhardt......."

I know what Olivia is thinking, and she grabs my arm as if it's the last time.

The moment it is revealed that I am the master of Alsbringer, something irreversible begins.

I don't know what the title of Demon King in Hero's Mask will bring me, or what it will make me responsible for.

My eyes locked with Olivia, who looked at me pleadingly, as if this was her last chance.

Then, just as I was about to make my final decision.

Behind Olivia, a body, hanging by the neck from a waiting pole, suddenly appeared.

-Woof!

I moved my arm.

-Bam!

The corpse, which should have been dead, moved its limp right arm and grabbed the rope around its own neck.

-Poof!

-Puck!

I cut the rope, and I could see it fall to the ground.

-Ahhhhhhh!

-The corpse is movingaaaaaah!

"What?"

-Woof, woof, woof, woof!

Olivia followed my gaze and turned her head, watching as the dead body on the floor, twisted at a bizarre angle, rose to its feet.

That wasn't all.

-Delicious! Tut-tut!

One by one, the hanging bodies moved, dead or alive, and Olivia and I, as well as the angry crowd, could only watch.

"This, this....... This is....... what......?"

Olivia watched as the corpse staggered to its feet, its complexion white and its neck grotesquely stretched.

The dead body staggered to its feet, tongue hanging out.

-캬아아아아아아악!

It let out a cursed scream that seemed to echo from the bottom of the abyss.

\* \* \*

The public square quickly turned into chaos.

-Devil's curse!

The crowd screamed in confusion, and those who were close enough to hear the screams of the reanimated corpse were either stunned or fainted on the spot.

-Woof, woof, woof!

Then, the reanimated corpses screamed and bit people. They were biting people with enhanced physical abilities than they had before they died.

Is the maddening crowd paying the price of their insanity.

Or, were the dead people really Satanists?

The reasons and causes are unknown.

-캬아아아아악!

It was clear that the reanimated corpses would not be stopped by ordinary people, not only slaughtering people, but also biting the guards to death. The priests, who had been conducting futile inquisitions, were also unable to cope with the suddenness of the situation.

-quack!

There was even a priest who had his throat bitten out by the corpse he had just hanged.

There's no time to waste.

I summoned Alsbringer and ran into the middle of the carnage, and so did Olivia.

"Watch out, Reinhardt!"

"Yes"

Considering the number of reanimated corpses, fighting together is even more damaging.

Enchantment.

And self-implication.

Run as physically strong as possible.

Just now, it has bitten someone's throat and is swinging its Alsbringer at the corpse looking for its next victim.

-skuck!

I succeeded in decapitating the corpse.

-Woof!

However, the decapitated corpse floundered and tried to grab my arm.

It moves when you blow its neck.

The special case of reviving a corpse.

This is most likely the result of an unholy force.

If so, you should use Tiamata, not Alsbringer.

-Snarl!

I sent the Alsbringer back, drew my Tiamata, and stabbed it into the flailing corpse's chest.

-Poof!

-Gurgle! grunt!

A sickening gurgle of blood rose from the neckless reanimated corpse's throat, but only for a moment.

-Hurrah!

I could see the white flames rising from Tiamata, consuming the body, burning it as if it were on fire.

The body isn't burning, but Tiamata is burning something.

As if to burn away the unclean energy with a torch.

This is the first time I've actually used it in an undead fight, but it was absolutely effective.

-Hair

The motionless body collapsed helplessly.

-Thump! Perguck!

Olivia was engulfed in a white glow, punching and kicking her way through the munching corpses one by one.

Don't worry about that one.

-Oh, oh.......

-Divine Light is.......

People were muttering in a daze when they saw our presence in all this sudden chaos and carnage.

"Holy shit, where's the time, get out of here!"

After yelling at the stupid crowd, I moved on to my next target.

-Kyaaaaah!

As if in response to the Tiamata, the bodies mowing down people indiscriminately looked at me and screamed.

We don't know if it's some kind of magic or if it's the work of a real satanist.

They're corpses with combat capabilities no mere mortal can match. And I know this from my last encounter with zombies.

The real problem with them isn't their combat prowess, it's their underlying fear. The sight of a corpse lunging at you with its abnormally elongated neck and outstretched tongue is enough to paralyze your reason and make your legs go weak.

That's why even the armed guards are fleeing in a panic.

The true power of the undead comes not from brute force, but from the fear and revulsion that comes from their horrific appearance.

"Let's go back to the body."

But I've been there, done that.

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"Whoa......."

The reanimated corpses totaled twelve.

Their physical abilities had become so powerful that they were no match for regular soldiers, but they were no match for me and Olivia.

I know there are countless people who are stronger than me, but I'm still a superhuman in a different league from the rest of us.

I took down five, Olivia took down six, and the awakened guards took down one, and I finished them off. Just as Tiamata's power immobilized the purified corpses, Olivia seemed to draw on Tuan's power to immobilize them.

But the situation was dire.

There were bodies lying dead, their throats bitten out, their heads crushed, their limbs torn off.

The bodies seemed to number at least fifty.

In a very short time, there was carnage.

Many fled, but others remained frozen in place. Fear had taken hold of their legs.

If they killed these people because they were convinced they were satanists, shouldn't they have thought that something terrible might happen to them that existed outside their scope of thought? I don't like to laugh at people who are paralyzed with fear, but when it happens, I can't help but feel a surge of anger.

"I....... Thanks for saving me. What the hell is this......."

The guards were near the awakened bodies, so many of the dead were lightly armed, but those who recovered their senses took up arms and fought.

The man in charge, as well as the other guards, still looked terrified.

"Just get the people out of the way first. I don't have time to explain who I am."

"Yes, yes!"

Not everyone recognizes a holy object. I don't know what you'd think of a tiara in my hand, but I'm sure you'd think it was a bad thing.

I didn't intend for it to happen this way, but I'm going to be known as the warrior who jumped into the middle of a massacre and slayed the undead.

Olivia approaches me from a distance.

"Reinhard....... This looks like......."

Olivia trailed off.

I know what you're trying to say.

It could be black magic, but they seemed to focus on other possibilities.

The power to raise the dead.

This is also the power that the cursed Tiamata wielded, and it was the power of Kier, the reverse of Tuan.

It is likely that the holy power of demons is being used. That said, it's possible that an actual demonic religion is involved in this situation.

And.

The situation in the Great Square has been cleared, but there are no signs of additional guards arriving.

-꺄아아아악!

-Oh, help!

-Run away!

I could hear people screaming in the distance.

Olivia could feel the awe-stricken stares directed at us from the guards and the people whose legs had come undone.

Olivia had sad eyes.

Because people now know what to do.

I don't think she recognized Olivia and me.

It's pretty obvious what people will do when they see a mystical man or woman who appears as a salvation in a dire situation.

-God sent a messenger......!

-You saved us!

I watched as people looked at us and bowed to themselves, and Olivia watched with a complicated gaze.

Some people hang others, while others worship them.

Olivia doesn't look at them, but at the great square.

There were a lot of bodies from the shoveling, but none of them were moving anymore.

"Let's go, Reinhardt."

Something has to be done about all the crazy stuff going on in Raziern.

\* \* \*

The carnage in the Great Square has subsided, but the reanimated corpses have shown physical abilities that exceed those of normal humans.

Importantly, this seemed to be happening all over Lazierne, not just in the Great Square.

-꺄아아아악!

-Run away, run away, run away!

Unexplained fires were engulfing the city, and reanimated corpses were munching on people.

The dead were coming back to life and attacking people, so it was only a matter of time before it got bigger.

At this rate, Raziern will be a raging inferno of reanimated corpses.

-skuck!

"Gee......."

As the living corpse was dismembered with the Tiamata, a white torch blazed from the cut, burning away the evil energy.

If this is indeed the power of the drunken Kier, then Kier is also a Tuan, and is therefore purifying the power of the same being with the same power.

-꺄아아아악!

-Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

Chaos was always chaos, but Raziern was turning into a murderous chaos.

That's not all.

-Woodruff

"Holy shit, it's coming to life."

The bodies Olivia and I dealt with didn't come back to life, but those in the streets suddenly began to move in bizarre contortions after a while.

Unless they are purified by divine power or crushed to the point of no return, dead bodies rise not long afterward.

-Quizik!

Olivia stomped on the head of a body that was just beginning to move, crushing it.

Olivia's lips were pressed together, her expression twisted into a horrible grimace. No matter how undead you are, you're still crushing someone who was alive not long ago.

-Don't be intimidated!

-Cut off the limb! Cut it off!

The only saving grace was that I could hear the shouts of a battle going on somewhere.

This fight requires priests and paladins, not just armorers.

However, it is doubtful that there are many high-ranking priests in the small provincial state of Levaina. In fact, even the priests in the Great Square were bitten to death, unable to do anything without freezing. They're not used to fighting.

"Any idea when help from the Alternate Empire will arrive.......? Or will it even come......?"

Olivia muttered in despair.

There's a warp gate, so when word gets back to the Empire, reinforcements will come, and there's a specially trained Imperial force, so we'll be able to deal with that, but can Raziern survive this bizarre situation where the dead are coming back to life?

In Raziern, which had suddenly become a living hell, Olivia and I ran and ran to find the epicenter of the outbreak.

Slicing, dicing, and crushing the reanimated corpses you encounter along the way.

-Woof!

Burning houses were crumbling.

A naturally occurring fire would never spread this fast.

There's no way Lazerne could have gone up in flames so quickly without someone setting it on fire in an organized fashion.

"Reinhardt! Over there!"

I wonder how far she ran. Olivia pointed to the end of the straight avenue.

There, in black robes, was a group of men.

Someone waved a hand at an otherwise intact house, and I could see the wave of flames engulf the entire building.

Someone setting a fire.

Is it magic?

And in the midst of those robes, he was the only one on horseback.

No, it's not just words.

"Ghost horse......?"

It was a translucent horse, a blur of blue and white.

A ghost horse called a phantom steed.

In the midst of the group, the figure on the ghostly horse turned its head toward us from a distance.

The distant flames made it difficult to see the shape of the figure.

But it felt obvious.

Git warns you.

That thing is watching me.

In the distance, both Olivia and I could see the black-robed figure spurring away.

I don't know who he is.

But it's coming.

"Tiamata is now yours."

"Yes."

It was clear to me that Olivia was no match for unarmed combat.

Tiamata in Olivia's hand, Alsbringer in mine.

The ghost horse doesn't run, it glides through the streets, charging toward us at an unbelievable speed.

-Slurp!

It approaches us, wielding an elongated binoculars in its black-robed hands, its face not even visible through its robes, just a black mass.

It rides up on a ghostly horse with a spear in its left hand and a sword in its right.

In a flash, the knight approached, swinging his spear at Olivia and his sword at me.

-Quack!

-Bam!

I jerked away from the grip with a searing pain, and Olivia's posture swung wildly.

I wasn't hurt, but the force of the weapon was too much to bear.

-Kurrrrrr

Each of the weapons he held in his hands was shrouded in an unidentifiable black aura.

"What are you assholes doing?"

My question to the phantom horseman, who quickly closed the distance between us after one attack, is answered by a voice slowly emerging from the darkness.

"By the devil."

A knight on a charging ghost horse, says Nazik.

"You wish for the destruction of Levaina."

......?

When I!

\* \* \*

I don't even know these guys.

What kind of bullshit is that, that the Great Demon wants Levaina's destruction?

I don't understand.

And if this is the extent of their power, why have they been silent until now? Have they expanded their ranks?

We could only make uncertain estimates, but nothing was certain.

But the ghostly horsemen rode in again, this time carrying two dark weapons.

It's not like a horse can run.

It moves in, this time targeting only Olivia, not me. As if it knows it has to take out Olivia first.

-Whoosh!

The first attack was hard to take, but Olivia is imbuing Tiamata with powerful divine power this time. Tiamata would be more effective in Olivia's hands than in mine.

-Bam!

A fierce shockwave exploded from the sword that met Olivia's. Olivia didn't retreat this time, but the ghostly horseman appeared to be unscathed, moving past her.

The rider stares at Olivia, still. She can't tell what he's thinking in the darkness.

The ghostly horsemen had decided to take on the two of us, and the black-robed horde had disappeared from the street.

You can't run away.

The ghost horse he's riding is not a normal horse.

It's as if we're defying the laws of physics.

-Bam!

"Boom!"

It rushes up, slams into him, passes him on the other side, and then rushes back down again as if he had no inertia.

The subjects moved as if unbounded by inertia, and the speed and power of the striking and thrusting weapons were real.

"Reinhardt! Watch out!"

-Quack!

"Boom!"

Even with my magical enhancements, I felt a powerful pain in my wrist as I parried his spear, as if it would shatter.

But it's not just a consensus-destroying force.

It hits me once, and then spins around in a frightening turn without giving me a chance to recover from the impact.

-Benefit!

"Holy....... Shit!"

Without any recoil, the phantom rider lunges at me with his spear in my face.

I don't know what it is, but you're trying to kill me because you're on the side of the devil!

-Bam!

Just as he was about to thrust his spear at me, Olivia jumped in and parried his spearhead.

-Kiiiiii!

In an instant, the horse's head swiveled, and the ghostly rider who had retrieved the spear returned to the flank.

"Are you okay, Reinhardt?"

"Yes, for now."

I don't know the details of his abilities, but the Ghost Rider's abilities are far beyond my own. I don't know how it compares to Olivia's, but it's clear that he finds her annoying.

"How do I say that?"

A ghostly horse whose movements seem to defy the laws of physics. The rider's helplessness is one thing, but when he's on that ghost horse, he's got the upper hand.

"I'll try to catch it somehow."

In addition to the Tiamata in Olivia's hand, there was a small white star in her left hand.

With her magical and divine enhancements maximized, Olivia almost looks like an angel descended upon the battlefield, even though she's out of place in this situation.

With everything around him on fire, he seemed to have come down for judgment rather than salvation.

-Kiiiiiiiiiii!

The ghost horse lets out a grotesque whinny and charges Olivia and me once more.

-Quack!

The sound of weapon against weapon rang out, and the rider didn't pass Olivia this time.

No, it didn't.

Olivia and I were pushed back by the countermovement.

That wasn't the end of it.

-Kang! Ka-kang! kang!

Rather, she was trying to immobilize the horse and drive the rider back. Olivia aimed at the horse and swung her weapon, but the rider knew what she was doing and parried her every strike with his spear and sword.

Olivia is Olivia, but the Death Knight's power is immense.

She was skillfully parrying Olivia's swings with both hands, wielding her sword and spear with both hands.

It's a ridiculous monster.

But.

Pincer attacks are absolute.

While he focused his attention on protecting the ghost horse from Olivia's attack, I grabbed the rider's back.

First, you need to get off the horse before you can think about the next.

What you need now is speed, not strength or skill.

It's been a while since I've used it in real life.

Fast (迅速).

Focus the power of self-suggestion on speed.

Other forces are also added to it.

The stronger the enemy is, the stronger Alsbringer strengthens itself. Since the enemy is clearly stronger than you, the condition is met.

One step.

The moment you take a step.

I caught up to the back of the rider with such speed that even I was surprised at my unaccustomed speed.

The rider, however, seemed to react to my speed, parrying my sword with a spin of his spearhead.

-Bam!

"Boom!"

It was the best speed I could muster at the moment, but the rider reacted to it.

But like I said.

In the end, pincer attacks are absolute.

With the spear in his left hand blocked and Olivia's sword in his right, the ghostly rider found himself with both arms locked, unable to move forward or backward.

It moved like it was defying the laws of physics, but it never moved sideways.

The moment that stopped me in my tracks.

-Ka-dum!

With her free left hand, Olivia snatched the rider's sword from his grasp. Enveloped in light, Olivia's grip on the rider's sword tightened. Twisting it wildly in her hand.

-skuck!

With a tiamaata, you blow the ghost horse's head off.

-keeeeeeeeeeeeee!

With an eerie whimper, the ghost horse turned into a blue mist and scattered, and we quickly distanced ourselves.

The rider dropped to the ground on the back of the horse, which was now behaving erratically.

-Thump!

The rider in black robes said nothing about the loss of his horse. Except for those first words, he never spoke, never showed any emotion or mood.

-Bam!

The lance, longer than he was tall, was abandoned by its rider, and he clutched only the darkened sword.

"What are you guys?"

Olivia speaks to the rider, who is still holding his sword and watching the two of us.

"Are you the Devil's minions?"

The rider's skill was one thing, but finding out who they were was more important to Olivia.

In his robes, the mysterious horseman looks at us and speaks.

"Yeah."

This is crazy, crazy stuff.

When I!

I don't know you guys!

A clueless man claims to be my servant.

"What the prophets could not do, we will do."

Prophet.

Seeing as how they call the devil a prophet, I'm guessing they're Satanists.

I'm not entirely sure what's going on here, but I think I know what their purpose and intentions are.

Now that the Demon has failed in his assault on Levaina, these people who think they're prophets are raiding Raziern to accomplish what I failed to do?

I can't believe it's gotten to this point.

-Kurung!

His sword begins to pulsate with black energy.

It's a far cry from the momentum we've seen so far.

It's not as if you've gotten off the horse and become less combative, but as if you're about to unleash your true power.

The weapon itself, with its chilling aura, already seemed like something bizarre was going to happen the moment they met.

"Yeah."

Olivia's mouth curled into a wicked grin.

"The devil, that's not possible."

Olivia isn't here because she needs to get to the bottom of this case.

If the Devil's minions are making Raziern look like this in real time.

He was convinced that the demon had saved him, or that there must have been some other reason.

I said I needed to be convinced.

So, I just got it.

No matter how repulsive and unpleasant human behavior may be, all humans are fundamentally evil.

However.

You won't know the root of every demon.

-꺄아아아악!

-Sa, sa, help me, help me, help me!

-Kaaaaaaaaaah!

If it's the devil doing this.

The devil is evil.

Olivia is convinced.

"And."

Olivia Ranze clutches her tiara and glares at the Black Knight with an eerie expression.

"To borrow from the powers that be, no more begging."

Olivia abandoned God.

But she's still using divine power, lending her strength. But Olivia now seemed to be trying to deny even that principle.

"Light."

I'm not asking you to save us.

I'm not asking you to lead us.

It's not a plea.

"Come to me."

To the light, follow me.

Olivia commands.

-Woof!

The white light from the thiamatha becomes more and more intense and eventually begins to take on a golden hue. Olivia Ranze uses tiamata in a different way than I do.

I know now that the divine power gives Olivia strength in some way, so I don't have to ask for it, and I don't have to believe in it.

Olivia was chosen by God.

To the gods, who lend me strength in whatever I do, because I am chosen.

Now we tell them to give it their all.

-Currrrrr!

Olivia Ranze, caught in a torrent of divine power so immense that the atmosphere shudders, stares at the Black Knight with murderous eyes.

Not even Libertarian Rancher was this good.

While Leviathan might have the edge in practical skill, I could feel Olivia overtaking him in terms of divine power.

Even from my vantage point, I could feel the atmosphere shake with a storm of divine power.

But the seemingly evil being in front of her didn't back down at all.

The black knight's aura was ominous, but the storm of divine power raging through Olivia was too great.

Olivia's divine power was already immense, but amplified by the Tiamata, it seemed as if the release of that condensed divine power would be enough to destroy the world.

Olivia in the light and the knight in the dark.

The black knight lunges at Olivia.

But it just looked small and shabby, like a ferry against the tide.

Facing the charging Black Knight, Olivia focuses her Holy Power on Tiamata.

A dazzling golden glow began to focus on Tiamata.

Tiamata and the Black Knight's sword clash, the latter's holy power seeming to explode at any moment.

Stabbing sword, Olivia from top to bottom.

Honest, but with a pressure that feels like it could bring the world down.

That moment when two swords clash.

-Flash!

I watched a storm of light engulf the world.

Episode 402.

-currrr

After a torrent of divine power swept through the area.

I could see pellets of light falling from the sky.

It was a torrent of such power that I was caught up in the storm and swept away.

Olivia was in the middle of the storm, looking off into the distance.

There.

There was a thing, its black robes torn to rags, its bones all exposed, black smoke billowing from its mouth and eyes.

-Saaaaaah

It's not dead.

In the first place, it was moving dead.

Olivia murmurs to herself as she looks at the skeleton that has stopped moving.

"Death knight ......."

What stood in our way was Death Knight.

We watched as its skeleton slowly crumbled to ashes.

Needless to say, the Death Knight is a top-tier undead. This is evidenced by the fact that despite Olivia's massive use of Tuan's holy power, which is the highest for an undead, she is left with nothing but rubble instead of vaporizing.

"The world is going crazy, that thing is showing up where people live."

Olivia grits her teeth and mumbles something like that.

However, the fuss isn't over.

Only one Death Knight had been dealt with, and the city's uproar was accelerating.

And.

-kiiieieieieieie!

With a deafening clatter, a ghostly horse emerged from a street corner.

"There was more!"

Another Death Knight was approaching from a distance, perhaps knowing that one had been taken care of, or perhaps to eliminate the danger.

Even.

-hhhhhhhhhhhh!

Not one, but two.

Olivia's expression turned serious.

"What the hell....... What the......."

It took a tremendous amount of energy to process even one chi.

Olivia's expression turned grim as two more appeared. Two is hard.

Is this really the end of the road for Laziern?

Approaching at breakneck speed, the two Death Knights were each aimed at me and Olivia.

Olivia is out of health, and I'm outmatched against Deathknight.

If I use a retreat to create a gap, can I deal with it?

Since they say they serve the Devil, will they stop attacking if I reveal that I'm the Devil? If so, how do I explain that to Olivia?

You have to make a choice.

Is Olivia on my side?

Will they believe me when I tell them I didn't mean for this to happen?

The moment he was about to pull Sarkhegar's ring off when two Death Knights charged in.

-shhhh!

A blue flash passed between me and Olivia.

-Bam!

Both Olivia and I could see the flash go straight into the chest of the charging Death Knight.

I could see the sword embedded in the Death Knight's chest plate, engulfed in fiery blue energy.

And.

-shhhh!

Another blue flash past us.

This time it was a person.

-Bam!

Both Olivia and I watched as it leaped and kicked the other Death Knight, sending him crashing into a burning building.

In a flash, he's disarmed two Death Knights and pinned one in the corner, and he looks back at us.

"Mr. Reinhardt, Miss Olivia."

Director of the Special Investigations Division.

The Shanapelle 3rd Battalion.

"Things are bad, go back to the empire."

There, Swordmaster.

Scotra Kelton gave us a blunt instruction.

\* \* \*

He's been deployed to critical sites, and he's a general manager, so I figured he must be pretty good.

Add to that the fact that he's the third captain of the Empire's premier knightly order, the Shanapels, and it's no wonder Scotra Kelton is a Swordmaster.

However, Olivia used her Awakening-level Holy Power, and I was blown away by two Death Knights who were too much for me to handle, one sword thrown and one kick.

I was reminded that the Swordmaster is unique among superhumans.

However, the Death Knights weren't easy either.

-Swoosh!

One Death Knight nonchalantly pulled out the sword embedded in his breastplate and threw it away. As if there were no such thing as a fatal blow unless it was divine, unless it was to shred.

The magic in the sword could not be sustained for long, and it had already lost its shine.

-curl!

Then, pinned to the wall, the Death Knight crawled out into the street, tossing the debris like Styrofoam.

"......."

Stumpy limbs.

But the darkness seems to be on fire.

Grotesque beings, radiating ominousness, stood before Scotra Kelton.

"Death Knight."

I kind of intuited it at the point where I was riding a ghost horse, but it's Death Knight.

The Death Knights didn't charge at Scotra Kelton.

The Death Knights slowly begin to retreat. They've decided that taking on the Swordmaster is too much.

They backed away, then took a few leaps to put some distance between us.

-Snarl!

As they reached for the air, a ghostly horse summoned from thin air and clung to the reins.

-Kiiiiiiiiiiiii!

The Death Knight summoned a ghost horse, mounted it, and rode off through the burning streets at an untraceable speed.

Skylar Kelton didn't chase the fleeing Death Knights.

"There might be more of those. I'll escort you to the gate."

He seemed to prioritize my and Olivia's safety.

"I've sent a messenger to the ecliptic, and the Crusader Knights and Imperial reinforcements should be arriving shortly. The situation should stabilize soon, and you need not be involved further."

-Ahhhhhh!

-Mom!

It's hell everywhere.

Too many things are already not okay.

Scotra Kelton told me that everything was going to be okay, which me and Olivia didn't believe at all.

\* \* \*

The Swordmaster told us to stay out of the situation, but we couldn't be stubborn.

We don't know how much power the cultists have, and we've seen firsthand the power of the top undead, the Death Knights.

I defeated one, but there were two more, and I couldn't tell how many more.

-keeeeeeeeek!

"I'll take care of it."

Animated corpses appeared and lunged at him, but Kelton struck them with the face of his sword, not the blade of his Auror Blade.

-Bam!

As if engulfed in a massive explosion, the charging undead exploded like balloons, terrifying to strike with the sword.

This is the method used by Saviolin Tana to deflect my and Ellen's swords.

If it was used with the sincere intent of killing an opponent, it would explode in a shockwave just by being hit.

I realized how much Saviolin Tana had been looking out for me and Ellen.

As soon as Scotra Kelton sensed something was amiss, she sent a messenger to the Empire.

The troops arriving to defend the burning Raziern could be seen cleaning up the mess, even before they reached the Warp Gate.

"I'm here because I saw the light, but have you spoken to the Death Knight?"

He asked us, as if he was going to keep us informed until he returned to the ecliptic.

"They said they were....... and that they were the Devil's minions, and that they were probably calling the Devil a prophet....... When I see them using words like that, I think......."

"I'm guessing it's the Satanists, since they're the only ones who can call the devil a prophet."

"Yes....... The way he talks about trying to finish what the Prophet couldn't....... I think he planned this raid after the last one failed."

"Hmmm......?"

Scotra Kelton narrowed her eyes at Olivia's words.

"Are you sure you heard me right?"

"What? Oh....... That's definitely what I heard."

He knows that the last demon attack was a hoax, so he's not going to believe it.

The Devil has failed in his assault on Raziern, so he is sending his more powerful minions to truly destroy Raziern. Olivia can only understand that.

But Kelton knows that the demon had nothing to do with the last raid in the first place.

So we can't help but notice that the whole idea of the Demon King's men attacking Raziern to complete the Demon King's failed raid makes no sense.

Of course, he didn't tell us the inside story.

You may have intuited that something was off about the attack on Raziern by the cultists.

"Hmm, and......."

That's not all.

He even saw that it was Olivia holding the tiara, not me.

"I think you'll have to talk to the director about that."

Shanafel realized that Olivia could use Tiamata, not just me.

That means the imperial family will know about it.

\* \* \*

Arriving at the warp gate on Raziern, a large number of armed troops poured out of the gate. While it would have been riskier to send troops beyond the bounds of internal affairs, the royal family of Revayna would have welcomed the Empire's presence with open arms, not resisted it.

And there was a familiar face waiting for us.

"You're safe, both of you."

Saviolin Tana.

She stood guard near the warp gate with the rest of the Shanapelle. It was a critical defense point, not because they were doing nothing, but because the destruction of the warp gate would severely disrupt the flow of troops.

Tana walked over to me and gently pulled me into a hug.

"I'm sorry. I thought this place was safe."

Still, the head of Chanapelle came in person because she knew I was here and Olivia Ranze was here.

I could hear the deep regret in her voice.

"For now, everyone return to the Temple. We'll deal with whatever happens in Raziern."

Hero or Warrior.

It was going to be something like that, and I actually did something like that. Although it was technically Olivia who did it, not me.

But the scale of the incident has grown so large that the situation is now beyond the reach of individuals like me and Olivia.

His fingertips trembled slightly.

The intense gravity of the weapon that the Death Knight wielded was not easily forgotten.

And Scotra Kelton whispered something in Xavier Tana's ear.

Hearing that, Tana's eyes widened. At Olivia, to be precise.

"Go back to ...... for now. We'll talk more later."

Raziern was an overly dangerous place, and not the place to talk.

\* \* \*

It is the Empire's role, not ours, to put an end to the disturbances in Razierne. Even a small nation can't afford to have its capital attacked by an unidentified band of pagans, so the Empire deemed the situation serious enough to send in every single one of its specialty warriors, including Shanapels.

Of course, a very large part of that was because I was there.

The size of the force that attacked Raziern is unknown, but it will be no match for Shanapelle.

It was the first time I'd ever seen the Swordmaster in action, and it made my skin crawl.

The next step in disenchantment is the Master Class, but I'm not sure that's too much of a jump.

I couldn't deal with Deathknight, Olivia took out one with all her might, and Scotra Kelton took out two with ease.

The Death Knights even fled when they realized they were no match.

The night of the ecliptic was silent.

The capital of a small country somewhere on the continent was now in flames, and the Imperial City seemed oblivious to the fact, calm and serene, save for the troops moving urgently toward the gate.

Cross a few gates, no, just one, and you don't even realize there's a carnage going on somewhere.

The silence of the ecliptic seemed as foreign to Olivia as it did to me.

"Do you want me to keep it a secret?"

Olivia would know what I was talking about. If it became known that Olivia had taken ownership of Tiamata, she would be in trouble again.

You will be told, coerced, and oppressed to be a saint, to be our savior.

For Olivia, who hates it so much, it would have been unpleasant for Scotra Kelton to see Tiamata.

If I were you, I would ask Tana to keep it a secret that Olivia had become Tiamata's master. And Tana would keep the secret from both her and the Empire.

At my words, Olivia looks up at the night sky.

The sky was lit up with a seemingly endless array of stars. Somewhere out there, the acrid smoke and fires covering the ground made it impossible to see a single star.

Olivia stares up at the sky of the ecliptic, where she can see the Milky Way.

"You were supposed to tell people that you're the owner of Alsbringer."

"It's ......."

For fame, for political standing. To use it to tell people of the return of the warrior.

It's more for Charlotte's sake than it is to give people hope, but that's a side effect.

"Then they'll come after you, like they just did, right?"

The devil will come for me when the return of the warrior is known. Most people were worried about that, but I was convinced it wouldn't happen.

But then I realized, after what happened today.

There are followers of the Devil that even I do not recognize. There are those who claim to be the Devil's followers, who assume the Devil's intentions and act on them.

Olivia looks at me and smiles mischievously.

"Demons will go after those who pose a threat to them, and if you're a threat because you're the master of Alsbringer."

"The devil, and the master of Tiamata, will be after him."

"And, I'm stronger than you."

"The devil will try to get rid of me first."

Olivia's words seemed to squeeze the life out of me.

Those sad eyes, that heart for me.

It was like squeezing my heart.

"I want to protect you, but I almost didn't."

Two Death Knights.

If it weren't for the timely arrival of Scotra Kelton, things could have gotten weird. Olivia could have died, or I could have died.

"If you can't protect yourself, you'll have to become something, whether it's a saint, a warrior, a crusader knight, or the Pope of the Five Great Houses......."

Olivia looks at me.

"The first flourish of the Holy Empire, or whatever."

Olivia decides to pick up the name of the abandoned god.

Not for God, not for people.

For me.

"I'll do anything to protect you."

Olivia, who wants to live a life of her own choosing, runs away from the life she's been forced to live and ultimately chooses to die.

Because of my decision to walk a dangerous path for Charlotte.

Olivia is going down a more dangerous path than I am.

To create a situation where if the devil comes for me, I have to come for myself first.

Guilt rose.

I can't give this person anything.

Why should I take this risk for nothing in return.

In the guilt that rises up about that, I realize.

Is this what Charlotte is feeling for me?

So when she sees me, she doesn't even make eye contact, she just looks down and apologizes.

In the wrong place.

I knew how Charlotte must feel because Olivia was willing to sacrifice everything for me.

Thanks, but I'm more guilty than that.

What I am.

I said.

In front of Olivia's blind eyes, I feel guilty.

As if she knows that, Olivia smiles at me.

"It's the life you gave me, so I chose to use it for you. No, I chose it for me, so don't feel sorry for me."

Olivia decides to become Olivia Ranze again.

"So, Reinhardt. No matter what, even if the world turns upside down, even if the devil hurts you, even if the world hurts you. No matter what."

Olivia grabs me by the scruff of the neck and pulls me closer, kissing my forehead.

"I'll protect you."

I whispered softly.

Episode 403.

I was only away from the Temple for two days, and my return was at night. I was long past my bedtime.

So you know where I've been, but no one knows yet that I've returned from an encounter with the Death Knights in Razierne. Of course, an event being an event, rumors will soon begin to circulate in the Zodiac.

"......."

After parting ways with Olivia, I returned to my sophomore dorm to find Ellen sitting in the lobby in a daze.

I thought this might be the case.

Ellen looks at me.

"......."

I could see so many emotions in his eyes. He was sitting there, worried about me, wondering when I was going to come back, but when he saw me, he didn't know how to start talking.

Rather, he avoids eye contact and ducks his head.

I felt like my chest was being squeezed shut.

Are we just going to be like everyone else?

If that's the case, that's probably a good thing.

Shouldn't we be glad that we're in this situation to relieve each other of some of the emotional baggage?

You should.

It'll be less hard on each other later.

But I couldn't get comfortable. No matter what I said, it was deceptive. Because you can't choose everything, and I chose something.

I chose Charlotte.

Stay away from Ellen Artorius.

Just like that.

I'm trying to get past it.

-cook

Ellen, grabbing the hem of my shirt as I tried to pass.

"......."

"......."

I couldn't tell him to let go.

It's not like I'm holding on for dear life.

I don't know what to say, but I can't let it go.

He was only holding on very weakly, as if the slightest twist of his arm would cause him to let go.

It wasn't that long ago that I was hugging them so hard that they wouldn't let go.

Our relationship was destroyed by the word engagement.

So it's not a hand, it's a hem, and a very weak one at that.

Ellen seemed to think it was wrong for me to even do that.

"Dangerous place. Been there."

Ellen says, keeping her head down.

"......."

"I can smell something burning....... after."

You've been to a place that's been on fire, and your clothes are burnt.

Not knowing what to say, I felt like she could only guess where I'd been and what I'd been through from that.

I'm Ellen, who has a terrible aversion to putting myself in dangerous situations.

I hate it, but there's no stopping me from doing what I've decided to do. But this time, the danger was in a place that wasn't dangerous.

I couldn't uproot Ellen, and she couldn't pull me down.

"Keep going like this....... Dangerous place....... like this......?"

Ellen looks up at me, tears welling in her eyes.

I'm sure Ellen knows what I need to do.

"Maybe."

"......."

"It's okay, I'm not going anywhere really dangerous, and even if I wanted to go, people wouldn't let me."

That's a lie.

Even in a less dangerous place, something as sudden as this could happen. Knowing that my followers are happening in places I can't control, I can't necessarily assume that everywhere I go, even this ecliptic, is safe.

I could feel Ellen's eyes on me, and I could tell she didn't believe me at all.

Word of the Demon Cultists' assault on the Levainan capital of Raziern will soon reach the ecliptic. It will also be rumored that Olivia and I were there, and that I had an encounter with a Death Knight.

Ellen opened her mouth as if to say something, but eventually dropped her head again.

The hand that grabbed my sleeve finally let go.

\* \* \*

I'm back in my room in the dorm.

I couldn't stop thinking about it.

After washing up and just before getting into bed, there was a movement in the air.

-Snarl

From one side of the room, a white mist congeals and takes the shape of a human.

"So how was it?"

"Ah, my lord."

It was Lucinil, the silver-haired girl.

Lucinil is not the same as Sarkegar in the sense that he can sneak up on anyone. Lucinil acted as my bodyguard, but even that had its limitations, and he couldn't keep up with Raziern.

"I've heard it's not that dangerous, but......."

Whether it was from EpinHauser, Lucinil didn't seem too worried.

"Your expression says otherwise."

Of course, my frown right now has more to do with what I just ran into with Ellen than what happened in Raziern.

"The cultists have attacked Raziern."

"......what?"

Lucinil's expression hardened at my words.

Lucinil knows why I went to Raziern, so I'll only explain what happened afterward.

That the crowds in Raziern had gone mad with demonic fear and began to lynch and execute heretics, and that suddenly, real demonists were attacking Raziern.

Then there's the story of his encounter with the Death Knights and his escape from Raziern when things seemed to be getting worse.

The big question is this.

"I think they're following me."

"......What the hell is that?"

I know. It's so bizarre, it's hard to understand. I'm just as confused and pissed off.

"They were acting like I made them do it, like they were raiding Raziern, and they were calling me some kind of prophet or something."

"......You didn't do the Lazier thing in the first place."

"That's right."

I made a short tongue-in-cheek comment.

"They think I must have had a reason to destroy Raziern, and that's why they attacked it, hoping to complete the job I failed to do......."

I didn't actually lead the attack on Raziern, so what the cultists are doing is just a bunch of bullshit. It has nothing to do with my will, except for the deaths of countless people.

"An entire city has been burned to the ground by the over-loyalty of men they don't even know......."

Lucinil crosses her arms and sighs.

"What the hell are you doing?"

Lucinil was skeptical about the idea of world peace, but the demonic raids in Bertus's plot were also backing me into a corner.

I had some idea that the demonic religion, which was supposed to have died out with the return of the Devil, was growing in power somewhere, but it was eerie to see it in person.

"First, we need to find the Satanists and either put them under us or wipe them out."

Now that I've confirmed their loyalty to me, I need to find them and turn them into real subordinates, or destroy them if their ideas are too dangerous.

We need to find the cultists.

Lucinil shook her head at my comment.

"But how are we going to find it?"

"I'll have to think about that."

They wouldn't be out in the open in the first place, so there wasn't much we could do to catch them unless they were out in the open.

"Well, I'll share it with Council and Order for now."

"Yes, sir. And I'll try to get in touch with the imperial family, too, because I think they'll understand, but I think they need to be made aware that this isn't something we did."

"Well, yeah. I'd better make sure I'm clear."

He would make contact through Sarkeghar, but it would be good to talk to the imperial court as well.

A situation where trying to forge ties with the revolutionary forces has actually created a link with their arch-enemy, the imperial family.

The Empire expects us to be enemies at some point, but until they can take advantage of us, they will. Just as I am now.

It would be up to Rusinil to communicate his thoughts to Sarkegar.

"I know it was unavoidable, but don't do anything too risky. This is what it's like to leave your kid in the water."

I can't believe you're treating me like a child, like I'm a drowning child. Of course, I appreciate that you're worried about me, after all, but I can't help but imagine Lucinil biting her nails and freaking out at the news that I've gone to Raziern, and I think that's kind of cute, too.

"I might sneak up on you later, so don't be too surprised if I show up out of the blue."

"Well, that's great for me, but if anyone sees that, you know I'm not allowed to have a room in the temple, right?"

"That's for you to figure out, kid. Anyway, let's go back to......."

"Oh, right."

As it looked like Lucinil was about to leave, I thought of one last thing to say.

"That....... isn't any more important than demonology."

"What is it?"

"I think there's an emerging religion going on."

This is ridiculous now that I say it.

"Emerging religions? What kind of bullshit is that?"

"A religion is spreading among the people that believes in the resurrection of Lagan Artorius."

"Uh....... What?"

As stunned as I was. Lucinil's reaction was no different. Some people go crazy with fear and suspect their neighbors of being infidels, others go crazy with fear and look for ridiculous hope.

The cause is the same - fear - but the effect is very different.

"Wow....... I've seen a lot of bizarre things people do, but this is just out of this world......."

The current state of affairs, with the vain belief that a dead warrior will be resurrected because the demon has no opponent, seemed absurd to Lucinil.

"I'm sure that belief will dissipate once the actual owner of the relic is revealed to the world, but that's only because I have no reason to believe it right now......."

After all, by believing in the resurrection of the warrior, we believe that the devil will be defeated. I wonder if the belief in the resurrection of the warriors will naturally disappear when it is known that the devil's arch-enemy, not the warriors, has appeared in the world.

At my words, Lucinil stares at me.

"Is that....... Reinhardt, because I don't think that's the picture?"

"Yes?"

"I thought you said you were engaged to be married to a princess, and you were going to tell her you were the master of Alsbringer?"

"Yes."

What's the point of that?

"And the Alsbringer is the sword of Ragan Artorius, right?"

"Yes what......."

"Wouldn't that make people believe you were the reincarnation of Lagan Artorius?"

"?"

No, I don't know what that means.

"No, even if Ragan Artorius was really reincarnated, he'd be less than a year old now, and he's been dead for a little over a year. It's out of time for me to believe that I'm the reincarnation of Ragan Artorius, because that doesn't make sense......."

"Does it even make sense to believe in the resurrection of Lagan Artorius in the first place?"

"Ah."

The words made my head spin.

Right.

If people who believe in nonsense in the first place can't believe in more nonsense, what can they believe in?

If it became known that I was the owner of the Alsbringer, it was certain that the followers of Mercenaryism would treat me as the reincarnation of Artorius, or as a prophet, simply because I had the Alsbringer.

"Wow, our Bali is great, he's a prophet of the demon religion and a prophet of the warrior religion!"

Lucinil let out an evil laugh and pulled me into a hug.

-Wrong!

"Holy shit......."

"My baby is the best!"

"Why am I your kid!"

I roughly pull Lucinil away, and she smiles a wicked grin, hmmm, and contemplates.

"Wow, you're not kidding, you really do have a lot of titles, don't you?"

"The last rightful heir to the Darklands."

"King of all demons."

"Allies of the Vampire Council."

"Collaborator of the Black Order."

"Master of Tiamata and Apostle of Tuan."

"Master of Alsbringer and Apostle of Als."

"The prophet of all satanists."

"There is a prophet of the Mercenary Order, and......."

Lucinil chuckles.

"And the sire of the Imperial family of the Gradual Empire?"

I'm getting dizzy listening to this.

"Isn't this a contradiction in terms?"

So.......

What the hell am I.......

What is it?

\* \* \*

As Lucinil says, it's a given that the followers of the Mercenary religion would worship me as a prophet if they knew of my existence.

And the Demon Cultists claim to be the servants of the Devil.

Two prophets with two very different attributes.

We decided to leave the search for the cultists to the council. They would want to contact the Demon, and if we could get through to them, we would have them in our hands. The problem was, we didn't know which way to go.

The next day.

Olivia and I got a call from Saviolin Tana.

"It turned out to be the Satanists who appeared in Raziern."

"......."

"After all......."

"At this point, we believe that the powers of the demons Kier and Talad were used."

Kier, God of Corruption, and Talad, God of Intimidation.

Demon priests, the opposite of Tuan and the opposite of the sun god, were brought in, which would mean that the demigods were working together like the Five Great Houses.

I thought they were using some sort of magic, but it was holy magic, the holy power of a demon.

"What's the situation?"

Tana's expression darkened at Olivia's question.

"It was all about dealing with the rising corpses. We managed to capture a few of the cultists, but they all committed suicide, and the point is....... We're tracking them, but we don't know what the outcome will be."

Saviolin Tana said it, but she seemed to think the trace would fail.

And Tana's expression was dark with guilt as she said it.

Shanapelle and the imperial court will know that the cultists have no direct contact with the devil.

Because it doesn't make sense that the Demons would come to finish the job on Raziern, which wasn't a Demon Raid in the first place.

The Empire's self-inflicted wounds had drawn too much attention. The damage done to Raziern by the Empire's self-inflicted wounds, and the misunderstandings of the demons there and elsewhere, was not pretty.

Saviolin Tana must be feeling a lot of responsibility right now.

There's been a demonic attack, and the dead can't be brought back.

So it's clear that he believes that the cultists responsible for this must be found and destroyed.

Saviolin Tana looks at Olivia this time.

Because Scotra Kelton clearly saw Olivia holding a tiara that was clearly mine.

"Me and Olivia are sharing a Tiamata."

It was me, not Olivia, who answered.

"Share......?"

Naturally, I was baffled because I had no idea such a concept was possible.

"Didn't I tell you last time, Tiamata was corrupted, and you purified the sword......."

"Yes, I did."

As I fought Charlotte, who had been possessed by a demonic spirit, I retrieved the Tiamata, and I told the story of Olivia, explaining how it was acquired. Olivia purified the corrupted Tiamata, and I became its owner.

He didn't mention that he shared Tiamata with Olivia.

"Since then, he and I have been able to use Tiamata together."

"Is it possible that....... possible......."

But even if it's not supposed to happen, it did happen.

"Yes, I completely understand that you wanted to keep it a secret. If you want me to keep this a secret, I can certainly do that. But you know there's nothing I can do about the rumors spreading from those who saw you two in Raziern."

"No."

At Tana's suggestion, Olivia shook her head.

"I'm thinking about going back to teaching."

Knowing that fame would kill her, Olivia decided to make herself more famous.

Saviolin Tana's eyes widened when she heard Olivia's decision.

Episode 404.

Rumors of a second assault on Raziern by the Demon Lord's minions, the Demon Cultists, have spread, causing a great number of casualties.

Tales of a demonic curse that caused the dead to rise and devour the living, and the dead to rise again and devour the living, filled people with fear.

While the Ecliptic did not see the extremes of Raziern's paganization, the mere realization of what Satanists could do when they drew their swords instead of being suppressed was enough to make people fearful.

Stories of Death Knights, whose names are as frightening as their faces, appearing in people's cities have added to people's fears.

Of course, that wasn't the only story going around.

At the site of the chaos, there was also a story of two warriors with holy relics.

The man with the Alsbringer.

A woman with a tiara.

Stories of the arrival of the Apostle of Alth and the Apostle of Thuan and their slaughter of the reanimated corpses, cultists, and Deathknights in desperate Raziern spread simultaneously.

It turns out that what Reinhard and Olivia did was actually correct.

However, it was the Empire's reinforcements and Schanapelle that made the difference. The Empire inflated Reinhardt and Olivia's accomplishments even further than they actually were.

-If it's an Alsbringer, it's a warrior's sword!

-And to Tiamata.......

-The gods didn't abandon us!

As quickly as fear spreads, hope follows.

If the Demon Remnant raids of the past have scattered fear, the two champions of the Raziern raid have instilled hope in the masses that is more powerful than fear.

A warrior has emerged to take on the demon, two of them.

Their direct identities are not known. But rumors spread like wildfire.

Some know that he is a second-year Temple Royal student named Reinhardt, and she is a sixth-year Temple Royal student.

The truth known by the few becomes the truth known by the many.

The hearts of those who were about to sink were being held by two champions who appeared out of nowhere.

So it was with more relief than fear that people heard the rumors of a distant country attacking Raziern.

The raids had come to be viewed not as news of tragedy, but as news of hope. After all, strangers had died in an unknown place.

Rumors that the Demon King's arch-enemy has appeared will expand to rumors that the Demon King is about to be defeated.

Those who know the truth know that Reinhardt and Olivia, no matter how strong they are, are no match for the Devil. Of course, even this is not the truth.

However, it doesn't matter if the hope is false or real.

If peace is sustained by false hope, it's not much different from real hope.

It's a way to keep people from getting lost in a belief system that can't be realized.

Whether or not they can actually do it, the belief that they will defeat the devil is enough to keep people going.

A few days later.

Winter Palace.

"......."

Bertus sat in his office, pondering.

Despite the Emperor's approval, the attack on Raziern was Bertus's idea. Bertus recognized that there would inevitably be civilian casualties.

However, we did not anticipate the subsequent damage.

That way, too.

Being a demon is inevitably hostile to the imperial family. It was only natural that he would be angry that his connections to the revolutionary forces had been thwarted and even exploited.

Fiendish Outbreak.

Their purpose was to fulfill a plan that the Devil could not.

Completing the plan is a bit of a stretch, since the raid on Raziern wasn't the Devil's doing in the first place.

If the cultists are the Demon's forces, they should have known that the events of Raziern were not the Demon's plan.

As such, fetishists would have no direct contact with the Devil.

"Is it really irrelevant?

But just in case.

It may have been done on purpose by a demon who was angry at being defeated last time.

The Raziern raid was disguised as a demonic attack, but the actual damage was not great. While some very important people were killed, many civilians are focused on numbers.

The death toll was not high, and the raid on Raziern failed.

So the devil was fooled, and he may have been angry that his disguised work hadn't done much damage.

You may have thought it was ridiculous that the forces of the Devil could barely destroy a small provincial capital.

So it's possible that they did this to show people what happens when you seriously try to raid somewhere. Whether it's their own swords or the fact that they've gotten a reputation for raiding, and they've gotten such a modest result, that in itself might cause people to look down on them.

So it's not unreasonable to claim that Satanists are doing the Devil's bidding.

You can also tell them to actually show up at the disguised raid location and make a mess of Raziern.

To warn Bertus that this is what happens when we sell our names.

The demon let Owen de Getmora live, but took revenge by destroying Raziern.

If this is the Devil's intention, Bertus has paid the price.

If so, the problem becomes very large.

Bertus estimated that there were only a handful of demonic remnants.

Individuals are very powerful, but they are never the majority, or so we've assumed.

'But if there's also a Satanist.......'

The number of demonic religions is by no means comparable to that of the Five Great Houses.

However, they are the highest level of undead, the Deathknights, and include priests who believe in the five demons.

It's a small country, but it has a powerful demonic high priest who can cast a curse that encompasses the entire capital of the country.

City-level terrorism.

The demonic remnants have already proven that they can wage war. Being able to unleash a demonic force is like saying the devil has an army.

What if the curse of the dead coming back to life to bite the living unfolded in the middle of the battlefield? Regardless of actual combat power, the morale-critical nature of all-out warfare would cause traumatized soldiers to faint or flee.

"It doesn't matter if the devil tells you to or not.

That's not the point.

Demonism is already a very serious security threat to the Empire in its own right, and must be eliminated.

Bertus didn't feel guilty that this was his fault.

'Rather good, now that I know these bastards are somewhere in the Empire before it's too late.'

I'm glad we realized that there was an anti-Imperial, anti-Christian force lurking somewhere that could do this, before they became more powerful.

In the current state of affairs on the continent, where rumors are spreading that the demonic religion is expanding here and there due to the quasi-movement of the demons, there are those who have fallen into fear and would rather believe in demons and demigods and seek salvation from them.

A tumor that would have gotten bigger if left alone had presented itself.

It's not a crisis.

It's a chance that won't come around again, and you need to grab it by the tail and rip it out.

-Smart

-Your Majesty, Owen de Getmora requests an audience.

Bertus cleared his throat at the knock on the door that followed.

"Tell him to come in."

At Bertus' simple command, the door opened, and an old man in a bowler hat bowed deeply to Bertus in acknowledgment.

"His Imperial Highness."

"Let's sit down."

Owen had come to see him for quite a few reasons, but Bertus seemed to have some idea of what he was here for.

Owen de Getmora, sitting on the couch, looks at Bertus with a serious expression.

"Your Majesty, the people of the Demon Realm have spoken."

"Because it's an opinion......?"

"They say this wasn't their doing, though I'm not sure if that's true or not......."

Demonology and demonic forces are not related.

While that claim may be false, it's clear that the demonic forces are reluctant to lose their imperial connections over this.

If that's true, and the Demon King has nothing to do with Paganism, what is the current Demon King's stance on Paganism?

"If that's true, then I'm going to find and subjugate them, and if it's false, then I already have them subjugated."

Even if you can't be sure, what you need to do is simple.

Finding and destroying the Demon Cult before it did was now the top priority.

Any delay would lead to a demonic takeover of the cult.

\* \* \*

"Tiamata......."

The Crusader Knightmaster's Chamber.

The current leader of the Crusader Knights, Elayon Bolton, squinted at the milky white hilt of the sword in front of him.

It was none other than Olivia Ranze who brought it.

Olivia took the mouse, the one she'd shown Tiamata, back into her hands with a nonchalant expression.

"It's great that you've changed your mind, and even better that you've been chosen by Tiamata......."

"That should be enough to qualify you for priestly ordination, right?"

Even if priestly ordination was the problem, even if Tiamata was not, Olivia is capable of more.

In addition, Tiamata has become the master of a powerful and great symbol. So much so, in fact, that there are those who would support him if he were to overthrow the current Crusader Knight Commander and take his place.

Elion Bolton glances at Olivia Ranze, who looks determined.

"May I ask what made you change your mind?"

"......."

It's not about protecting everyone, it's about protecting just one person.

Reinhardt has saved his life, so he will spend it on Reinhardt.

But Olivia is smart enough to know that she shouldn't say that.

"I saw a bunch of Satanists."

"Looks like the rumor that ...... was in Raziern was true."

"I thought, 'It's bad enough that humans are sticking together, I can't stand by and watch them mess up the world.'"

Olivia cites a universal reason.

Hating to be held to that universal standard, Olivia is forced to fulfill her saintly duties, and she turns around and ends up back where she belongs.

"Yes, you're still a student, so you won't have much to do. But as an honorary position, I can give you any number of titles, powers, and duties. Of course, I can provide staffing for whatever you want to do."

Elion Bolton looks at Olivia and asks.

"Do you have something in mind?"

Olivia has a reputation as a saint.

Just having a Champion of Tuan spread hope in the Temple of the Five Great Gods can have a significant impact. She was genuine and eager to help people, to save someone.

Elion Bolton believes that simply speaking hope to people who are grieving will bring them peace of mind.

Olivia answers the question as soon as it comes up, as if she has something in mind.

"I want to be an inquisitor."

"......."

At that, Elion Bolton's expression hardened.

Saint of Eredian.

I thought I was going to be in the business of saving, helping, and protecting things.

Upon his return, he volunteers to torture and kill someone, hunting down the infidel.

He's returned to the Order after seeing the horrors of the Demon Cult, so it's not surprising that he'd volunteer for a mission to root out the heresy.

The Crusader leader looks at the Tiamata in Olivia's right hand.

For generations, Tuan's champions killed humans, not demons, monsters, or the undead.

Hunting down cultists is what the Champions of Tuan have always done.

Is Olivia Ranze unable to escape the shackles?

An Eredian saint who couldn't step on an ant, for some reason, decides to become a pagan hunter.

"Good."

Elion Bolton believes this is what Tuan meant.

\* \* \*

Rumors spread like wildfire. And it's even faster when the rumor is being intentionally spread by the imperial family.

Demon Cultist Raid on Raziern.

The Champion of Tuan and the Champion of Alth who appeared in the place.

Plus their name.

It spread like wildfire. Normally, it wouldn't have been this bad, but with the mention of the Demon King on the continent, it was inevitable that the name of Daehan would spread like wildfire.

Inside the Royal Class, we knew this all along, but it was outside the Royal Class that mattered.

-If that person is that.......

-The Als are champions.......

Ellen and I were taking lessons from Tana, the violinist, but of course we were also taking regular classes.

Since Reinhardt's name is the only one on the roll call, he's bound to get a lot of attention.

Not only did I see a complete change in the way my classmates looked at me, but they were looking at me in awe, both men and women, and even the teacher.

And it's not just in the classroom.

"......."

"Hey, you....... You're popular......."

Riana muttered idly as she walked down the street with me.

We weren't really out and about, we were just walking back to the dorm after our psychic class.

-Wong Sung Wong

So here we are, me and Riana walking together, with a bunch of students chattering behind us.

-I'm dating.

-Even a warrior has to have a relationship.

-Could be a friend.

-Is it?

-No, he's dating last year's Miss Temple, I'm the spring.

-Really?

"......."

It's like he's some kind of idol with a fan club behind him, and there's a whole bunch of people following him, and I can't even begin to describe the.......

I was feeling like a dog in real time.

Riana seemed to be dumbfounded by all the attention in real time.

Why are you following me?

Why?

It's not like you're following me!

-Sir, look over here!

Something called a warrior.

When I heard it, it actually gave me goosebumps all over my body.

"Hey, you sons of bitches, go home and wipe your feet, why the fuck are you following me, eh?!"

Eventually, it exploded.

You're going to get another line in the sand for being a tough guy.

Riana went back to her dorm and declared that she couldn't go with you anymore.

\* \* \*

It was a terrible feeling to have people casually call me a warrior. I hadn't realized it could be so mentally damaging.

The expectations that people had for me turned into interest and hovered around me, and that was hard to bear. I even had a fan who followed me around, even though it had nothing to do with the class.

Even.

"Let's bet the Alsbringer."

There's even a bunch of crazies who come in with unfounded confidence and ask for a match.

"Let me test you to see if you're worthy to be master of Alsbringer."

It's hard to tell if they're hungry for attention or overconfident.

"What did you say, asshole."

-Bam!

"Kaboom!"

"If you're hungry for attention, shit in a Main Street fountain, you crazy motherfucker, and you'll have all the attention you'll ever need."

-Bam!

"Ugh!"

Apparently, I'm not as tough as I pretend to be, so they're trying to do something about it.

-Crack! That's so cool!

"......I want to kill myself."

Being a warrior.

In a different sense, I realized in real time that this is a mentally demanding job.

Episode 405.

There were plenty of people who followed me, but there were also plenty of people who didn't need to.

Most of them thought that if they could get past me, the next great warrior, they could get a piece of my popularity.

Otherwise, it seemed like some guys were following me around trying to hit on me because I had a girl they liked.

It had become a routine to travel around with a fan club and get into fights here and there. Ellen and Harriet were still on the sidelines.

Herriot seemed to be crying to himself.

I always had my hat pressed down over my puffy eyes.

I know I've been to dangerous places, just as Ellen has, and I know I will continue to do so.

I couldn't stop her, and I couldn't watch her, and she seemed to struggle.

Olivia was away from her dorm often.

She was assigned to be an Inquisitor for the Crusade. She was practically past the age of graduation, and since she would receive class credit for her outside activities alone, the Royal Class dormitory was now little more than a place to sleep.

Ellen and Harriet were depressed, and Olivia was trying to make a name for herself so that the devil would come after her, which was never going to make me feel better.

Stress here, stress there.

And.

When stress builds up too much.

My hair is falling out.

"Oh....... Xbal......."

At night, just before I fell asleep, I took a shower and froze at the sight of the damp blonde on my hands.

When I picked up my hair, I noticed a circular bald spot.

A common malapropism.

It was the size of a dime, and it was making its presence felt.

I didn't want to be reunited with this shit.

Why are you in my life again?

I thought we were supposed to break up for good.

"Whoa, whoa....... Whoa......."

Focus your mind. The circular bun was filled with hair in real time.

Hair Loss Permanent Immunity Ring.

The Ring of Dreadfind saved my life.

I am God!

God of hair loss!

Or should I say god of hair, because if he's a god of baldness, he's probably a god of hair loss.

I am God!

Lord of the hair! God of the hair!

Go ahead and dive in, I'll fill you up again!

For a moment, PTSD set in, but the Ring of Dreadfind saved me.

It's bad enough to be stressed out, but when you lose your hair, it's not doubly depressing, it's squared. It is neither added nor multiplied, but squared.

Without this ring.

It wouldn't have been able to enter the temple in the first place.

Without the ability to recover hair, I.

I thought I was going to make a name for myself as the first bald warrior in history.

Thanks Sarkegar.

You're a loyalist.

-TalkTalkTalk

And to my horror, when I returned to my room, a sparrow was tapping on my night window with its beak.

-Drupa!

I opened the window and a sparrow flew into the gun room, and when I drew the curtains, Sarkegar transformed into her usual dainty maid form as if she had been waiting.

"See you at the degradation......."

"I love you."

-Wrong!

"????"

Sarkegar flinched in embarrassment as I suddenly pulled him into a hug.

"You're the loyalist of the century, the one who will go down in history!"

Thanks for saving my hair!

No loyalist in the world has ever cured their lord of baldness!

"Yes......? Yes, I love you too, Jaehaeaaaah!"

Sarkegar didn't understand English, but he knew he had to do something, so he grabbed me and patted me on the back.

\* \* \*

Sarkegar was there for my own reasons, but he was probably curious about my sudden behavior, so I explained why.

"......Do you mean your hair is falling out?"

"......Yes."

Unlike me, who thinks hair is a big deal, Sarkegaard, a shapeshifter, just doesn't get it.

"Regardless, it's a great honor to know that the Ring of the Clan has solved the problem of degradation."

"No, I'm honored."

I was about to bow, which made Sarkegar even more puzzled.

"I'm here to tell you about my contact with Owen de Getmora, as per your earlier instructions......."

"Oh, right. That."

Sarkeghar stood somewhat stiffly and began to pull out the package.

"The Imperials seem to have taken us at our word for now, but there's every chance they won't believe us."

"So would ......."

It is entirely possible that the Imperials believe the last raid on Raziern was retaliatory. We can talk in private, but we're still enemies, and that can't be helped.

"We need to find the cultists before the Empire does."

"I guess so."

The race is on.

If you find the cultists later than the Empire, they die.

If I find them first, I can put them under my feet.

I'll have to think about whether or not I need to keep them under my feet, but for now, there's absolutely no reason to let the pagans run amok like this.

We'll save it for later, but for now, we need to make contact with the Demons to keep them from going on a rampage.

"I've been gathering my own information, and it seems that the Empire is estimating the point of origin of the demonic religion to be in the southern part of the continent."

Sarkegar said, looking cautiously to see if he had done any research. Sarkegar was a messenger, but as an imperial noble, he had unrestricted access to imperial information.

Of course, that goes for me too.

Continent South.

Of course, since the unit is a continent, the number of countries and territories that fall under the single word "overly southern" is almost unfathomable.

South.

"If you're in the South, the only thing you know is Friday's gazoo."

Galarsh, I'm told, is based in a place called the Gelkorgis Desert in the southern part of the continent.

Of course, there's a very real possibility that we won't be able to get valid information due to the sheer size of the project, but for now, focusing on Galarsh was the best we could do.

"I'll leave it to Rusinil to get your thoughts to the council."

"Yes, degradation."

I watch as Sarkegar, once again transformed into a sparrow, flies out the window.

Empire first or us first.

While Sarkegar has access to information from the imperial court, I'm better at this.

I am a warrior.

You can get to the information the Empire has gathered much faster than Sarkhegar can by taking many different routes.

If you get your hands on the cultists, do you dispose of them or use them?

I'd have to think about that as well.

\* \* \*

After that day of talk of engagement, Ellen stopped eating with Reinhardt in the middle of the night at restaurants.

It wasn't even a big fight.

It's not like we were seriously talking about calling it quits.

However.

Ever since she'd heard those words, it was as if they weren't supposed to do anything together. Outside of Tana's swordsmanship classes, Ellen and Reinhardt only glanced at each other when they passed each other.

But facial expressions.

The look on Reinhardt's face whenever he sees her is unbearable for Ellen.

If you care so much about Charlotte that you get engaged to her, and later married to her, to protect her. If you think that's good enough for you, I'd rather turn away.

The guilty glint in her eyes when she looks at herself haunts Ellen.

You'd think we'd be done here.

Because of the look in his eyes, she can't think that it's over. They don't act and treat each other as if they don't exist, but this feeling of being less than, well, less than, is what's hurting Ellen.

So.

Ellen sits in a diner in a daze.

Not eating or doing anything.

It's been a while since I've even felt hungry. By this time, I'm starving and need to eat something.

Sitting idly in a restaurant, waiting for someone who never comes.

Ellen didn't drink a drop of water.

I know Reinhardt isn't coming, but I can't sleep.

If you're outside, you might catch a glimpse of Reinhardt coming and going, but if you're in a room, that's not even a possibility.

Ellen in the lobby, in the dining room, on the stage.

I've had a lot of idle time.

If I ever come across it, I'll ask what it means.

Because it's all good.

Because I get it.

I want things to be the way they used to be.

I'm not going to feel like I want you all to myself.

As always, let's talk, cross swords, and maybe eat together sometime.

That's enough for me. If you and Charlotte get engaged, and beyond that, married, that's fine.

I thought we could be friends.

But.

Using that as an excuse to stay with Reinhardt is itself a sign that they can't be friends.

I was afraid that if I said anything, I would make the same mistake with Reinhard that I had made with my brother.

You said you liked me.

It was all a lie, and to let it go like this, so easily.

Was he playing with me? Why did you do that to me?

If Reinhardt were to die after saying that.

Fearing that she would never be able to take back what she had said, Ellen said nothing to Reinhard, afraid that she would hurt him with her words and not be able to take them back.

So Ellen wanted to talk to him, but she couldn't; she wanted to grab him and talk to him, but she couldn't.

Just as Reinhard tries to say something, but can't, so does Ellen.

It is already known that Reinhardt is the master of Alsbringer. Word has spread within the Temple, and the Royal Class dormitories are often crowded with Common Class students hoping to catch a glimpse of Reinhardt.

Ellen knows that this fame will one day be the knife that stabs Reinhardt in the back.

I want to do something, but I can't do anything.

You can't get involved in Charlotte and Reinhard's problems. She wants to help Reinhardt in his dangerous endeavors, but she knows he won't want to, so she can't even ask him to go with her.

So Ellen just sat there, dumbfounded.

Not knowing what to do or how to do it, just hoping to stumble upon it.

It was past his bedtime, and he knew Reinhardt wouldn't come out of his room, so he just sat around in the lobby and dining room.

Reinhardt didn't show up at the restaurant.

In her self-destructive malaise, Ellen thinks to herself.

All you can do is think about it.

All of this is happening because of one thing: Charlotte's life is in danger.

No engagement, no Reinhardt being in danger.

He wants to ensure Charlotte's safety at the expense of his own.

While it is known that Reinhardt is the owner of Alsbringer, the engagement is not yet public knowledge.

If Reinhardt is making a reluctant choice, then Charlotte's safety could mean that Reinhardt's engagement is off.

If it does.

I wonder if I should be next to Reinhardt again.

"......."

If so, how.

On that unforgettable night in Kamsenka, Ellen and Herriot listened to Reinhardt's explanation.

We don't know why, but Charlotte has lost the race to the throne, so her life is in danger, and she can't guarantee her safety unless she marries someone with a stronger cause than Reinhard.

How to make Charlotte safe.

Can I do that?

Ellen looks out the window of the restaurant and contemplates.

Be still and think about your name.

Ellen.

Ellen, Artorius.

"......."

Ellen stood up from her seat.

\* \* \*

-Smart

Late at night.

At the sound of the knock on her door, Charlotte jumped out of bed in her pajamas. It wasn't uncommon for Tana to come check on her in the middle of the night if she was worried.

"Lord Tana, you must be tired, go to sleep......."

-delay

So when Charlotte walked in the door, unsuspecting, she was stunned to see someone she didn't expect.

"ah......."

Ellen Artorius came to Charlotte in the middle of the night.

"Can I talk to....... with you?"

At Ellen's cautious words, Charlotte held still and looked into Ellen's eyes.

The desperation in his eyes was too much for Charlotte to resist.

\* \* \*

It's way past your bedtime.

Charlotte was in her pajamas and a coat, and Ellen was in her sweatpants, sitting across from each other on the terrace.

Charlotte was feeling guilty about Reinhardt.

And I had similar feelings for Ellen, if not more so than I did for Reinhard.

"Do you have anything to say?"

"......."

Ellen stares down at the table.

I don't want Reinhardt to be in danger.

Just as Olivia took on some of Reinhardt's risks, Ellen thinks she wants to do the same.

The world will focus more on Lagan Artorius' sister than on Reinhard and Olivia. It's a risky business.

That's something she can live with.

But how.

I hope he can make Reinhardt's inevitable engagement a non-event.

Charlotte de Gradias is losing ground.

So, we just need to get Charlotte's position right.

Ellen opens her mouth to speak.

"I'll be your knight."

"Huh? What....... What?"

It was so unexpected that Charlotte had no idea what she was hearing.

"If I become your knight, that alone will keep you safe."

Ellen Artorius.

Knowing the weight of the name, Charlotte couldn't help but panic.

Ellen didn't say anything more.

Instead of becoming the bride of Reinhard, Champion of Alth, Ellen Artorius, sister of Ragan Artorius, has chosen to make him her lord.

I didn't need to hear the backhanded way of saying, "Why don't you just do something you're not engaged to do.

Ellen bows to Charlotte.

"I will do many things for you. Anything for the Empire. I'll do everything. You can use me to do anything, and my balls will soon be your balls......."

Ellen pleads, her voice bitter.

"I won't say it's because I don't want you and Reinhard to be engaged. But Reinhardt will be in more danger. I'd rather be in danger. I'm everything. If there's anything Reinhardt needs to do, I'll do it........"

"......."

I can give you everything I have, but please don't take just one, the hero's sister asks the empress.

I see Ellen Artorius making these decisions because she doesn't want to lose Reinhardt.

Around this time last year.

Charlotte had seen the relationship between Herriot de Saint-Antoine and Ellen Artorius and pitied them.

I kept silent, thinking my words would destroy their relationship.

But now.

Charlotte found herself in the same position.

I became a taker, but I wasn't happy about it.

But now.

Watching Ellen make these choices because she didn't want to be deprived was not a pleasant experience.

If you decline.

If they are on equal footing.

Reinhardt knows who to choose.

As much as Charlotte didn't like her current situation, she certainly didn't like seeing Ellen's desperate expression.

"If they say no, what will you do?"

"......."

If she wants to be a knight, it's her choice to accept it or not.

If you grit your teeth and refuse, Reinhardt will betroth you to him.

If you look away from those desperate eyes.

"Please....... Please......."

If you turn away from those tears.

"Like this...... to....... Please......."

Maybe we can look forward to an even bigger future.

But Charlotte knows.

He himself was defeated by Bertus.

It doesn't matter if she's a knight, or a maiden married to a knight, as long as she knows that the demon's spirit resides within her.

We're at the mercy of Bertus.

You are always Reinhardt's burden.

I'd rather have a knight and his lord than a husband and wife relationship.

"Yes, be my article."

I smiled at Ellen.

"Instead."

Looking at Ellen, Charlotte smiles.

"This is the first and last concession."

You can't settle for a cowardly victory, so you want to win for real.

This is not a waiver.

You decide to cancel the unfair race and start together this time.

A knight who has no loyalty to his lord.

A lord jealous of his knight.

A strange pledge of allegiance, just beginning.

Episode 406.

Three days later.

I was in the Tetra, the central palace of Emperor Emperatos, observing a ceremony.

-One of the Five Lords, the great and pious Lord of Frostfire and the Lunar Operator who presides over the cosmic void. Apostle of Mensis, and kinsman of Ragan Artorius, savior of mankind and champion who slayed the evil Fado demon Valier. .......

The Pope of the Cult of Mensis, in a giant manifestation, chants incessantly at a kneeling girl.

Charlotte de Gradias standing in front of him in a dress and cape.

I watched, blending into the crowd of substitutes, as Ellen Artorius knelt before him, clad in a red cloak and dressed in conquest.

I didn't expect this to happen.

The engagement was never publicized, so that's it.

Instead of me becoming Charlotte's fiancé, Ellen becomes an imperial knight who serves Charlotte as her lord.

This ensures Charlotte's safety.

Just as Ellen was being noticed, I was being noticed as the new owner of Alsbringer, invited to this ceremony.

But of course, Ellen was getting more attention than I was.

No wonder.

The secret identity of Lagan Artorius's sister was revealed at the same time she became the imperial guardian knight.

Even the many dignitaries in the room stared at Ellen in awe.

Among those watching the ceremony was the emperor himself, Bertus de Gradias.

Bertus and my gaze met for a moment.

He gives me a little shrug.

I didn't see this coming.

But Bertus was by no means displeased.

I'm on the side of the imperial family, even if I'm not engaged to Charlotte.

That's where Ellen Artorius was added.

For a would-be imperial master, this can't be a bad thing. There's also the possibility that Charlotte could become a dangerous competitor in the future, as you have the power to take her down at any time.

This spiraled into a situation where Charlotte was assured of her safety and Bertus was assured that the empire would benefit from the support of the two warriors.

It's one thing for a warrior to be an empire, it's quite another for a warrior to defend an empire.

The support of a vast populace would be added to the imperial cause, giving the empire a legitimacy that was already strong.

A warrior is a protector of humanity, and Lagan Artorius killed a demon to protect humanity.

And the warrior's sister defends the empire.

That's the kind of legitimacy that makes it safe to say that empire is humanity.

To be anti-imperial is to be anti-human.

Empire becomes ethics, and the emperor's word becomes morality, not law.

The imperial power, strengthened by the victory in the Demon War, faltered a bit, allowing a few demonic raids.

But the horrific figure of the Demon unites humanity, and the Empire's symbolism, representing the will of the people, is strengthened by the support of its warriors.

Empires need demons.

And Bertus needs a demon.

The Pope of the Order of Mensis reads the document in full, and Charlotte touches the silvery-white sword to Ellen's shoulder, once, and then again, lowering and raising it.

Ellen became Charlotte's Knight.

But important.

Demonology.

We need to find them quickly.

They might try to kill me, Olivia, or Ellen in the name of eliminating the demonic threat.

-twinkle-twinkle

Applause rang out as the Emperor realized that he had not been sworn in as a Plain Knight, but as an Imperial Guardian Knight.

With that.

I don't have to be engaged to Charlotte.

But.

This led the empire to reveal three important secrets to the world.

Reinhardt, champion of the Als.

Olivia Ranze, champion of Tuan.

And Ellen Artorius, sister of the warrior and apostle of Mensis.

Three beings will make a name for themselves across the continent.

\* \* \*

Unsurprisingly, the temple was in an uproar.

Following in the footsteps of Alsbringer's master, word spread that a second-year Royal Class student was the younger sister of Ragan Artorius, the Savior of Mankind.

Even.

-You know, last year's Miss Temple, she's Mr. Artorius's sister!

-Really?!

-Somehow....... It didn't seem like a normal person.

-So.

With the added bonus of being a former Miss Temple, Ellen was bound to become an even bigger idol than Reinhardt.

-I thought you were the Empress's guardian knight?

-I guess you're both in the same Royal Class sophomore year.

-No, isn't he in the second grade, Mr. Reinhardt!

-Yes. That's right.

The whole temple was shaken up, and it was the same inside the Royal Class.

Herriot went white when he heard that Ellen had chosen Charlotte to be his mistress.

"Well, is that still....... still work?"

It was unthinkable before it happened, but after hearing the story of the Guardian Knight's ordination, Harriet understood why Ellen had made the decision.

"Why not?"

"Ellen....... It's going to be dangerous....... Obviously......."

Reinhard's work is important, but Ellen's work is important to Herriot.

Knowing this would put Ellen in danger, Harriet clutched Ellen's hand and sobbed.

Ellen held onto Harriet's hand and nodded, her expression steady.

"It's okay."

Ellen looks at Herriot.

"The Empire will protect me, Reinhardt will protect me, Riana will protect me, Adelia will protect me, and......."

Ellen looks at Harriet with trust in her eyes.

"You know you are."

There was never a hint of doubt in Ellen's eyes as she trusted everyone to protect her.

"......Yes. Ellen."

Herriot hugged Ellen tightly, and Ellen hugged him back.

Herriot already knew, but the reaction of his classmates was understandably one of horror.

"I'm sorry I kept it a secret, it was too big a secret."

"So......."

Liana and Adelia looked at Ellen and said.

"I'm still sorry, I could have told you."

"That's okay, but isn't it nice for a warrior to have a sister, even one this pretty and amazing?"

Riana was surprised, but not saddened, as if she were pleased. Adelia was puzzled as to why Ellen, whom she had always found a bit difficult to relate to, seemed so much bigger.

"What are you, that....... Artorius's....... brother?"

"Yes."

Olivia, who had been stopping by the temple from time to time, was also baffled by Ellen's identity.

"I ate ...... because I believe in everything."

"Well."

Olivia glared at Ellen, then clicked her tongue.

-Wrong!

"!"

"At least you're pretty this time, you cheap junior."

"Ugh! Ugh!"

Wrapped in Olivia's embrace, Ellen struggles against the force, but she can't break free of Olivia's grip.

Ellen could not help but know that her actions had played a crucial role in Reinhardt's decision to break off their engagement.

"......what are you doing?"

When she was finally released, Ellen gasped for air, her face flushed. Olivia tried to poke Ellen in the cheek, but with a shake of her head, Ellen dodged the gesture.

"They say the bear's got the talent and the bear's got the money. Hmmm."

Ellen was the one who declared herself a Guardian Knight, but Reinhardt claimed it as his own, and Olivia smirked and waved.

"I'm in a hurry, so I'll leave you to it, but think of something you want to eat, and I'll buy you a special meal!"

"No."

"Yeah, fuck off."

Olivia left the Hodadak Temple, wondering if she really had something to do. Ellen stared after her.

She'd heard that he worked as an inquisitor, but Ellen wasn't sure what exactly he did.

But the shadows cast by his backside looked a lot darker somehow, Ellen thought.

The reaction of everyone in the royal class was much different.

When it became known that the calm and accomplished sophomore was actually the owner of the ramen shop and Artorius's brother, the freshmen were not only shocked, but almost worshipful that there were two untouchable seniors in the sophomore class.

Of course.

Something very important also changed.

With the signing of the Guardian Knight, Ellen was a knight, albeit still a student. She was even a high-ranking knight, with considerable authority and power among knights, as the imperial guardian knight.

Of course, Ellen wasn't interested in any of that.

What mattered was the relationship between Ellen and Charlotte.

Ellen and Charlotte weren't always that close. They had a Reinhardt connection, but it was neither good nor bad.

However, the relationship between the two has been redefined as they are both guardian knights and lords of their own accord.

So, like it or not, the two have become a bit of a hierarchy.

"Ellen."

"Yes."

"You should call me Lord."

"It's a temple."

Ellen's statement that status is irrelevant in the temple, and therefore so are relationships with the gods, was, in some cases, correct.

But Charlotte opens her eyes and looks at Ellen.

"Are you going to call me Lord when you graduate?"

"Look."

Charlotte glares at Ellen at her blunt response.

"......."

"......."

Ellen has no loyalty to Charlotte.

If left unchecked, Reinhardt would be engaged to be married, and possibly even killed, so he reveals his identity and becomes a knight, hoping to gain greater fame and become dangerous instead.

Charlotte is no different.

He has little personal trust in Ellen, and feels that she is asking Reinhard to sacrifice too much, so he guiltily agrees to her request.

In other words, from a distance, the descendants of the warriors became a huge force in favor of the empire, but in reality, the relationship between the two was more like a chicken and egg.

To Ellen, Charlotte is the one who almost stole Reinhardt from her.

For Charlotte, Ellen is the one Reinhardt has the most heart for.

So.

Neither of us liked each other after what happened.

"Do you realize that I've made a lot of concessions, and don't you think you should be a little grateful?"

"I appreciate it, that's why it's your article."

Both Charlotte and Ellen have made some concessions.

Charlotte's decision to keep her mouth shut when she could have had Reinhardt was a concession, as was Ellen's decision to support the Empire by revealing herself as the sister of a warrior and risking demonic forces targeting her.

Charlotte had given up her future, and Ellen had chosen to defend the empire, even at the cost of her life.

So technically, they've exchanged rather than owed each other.

She may not be loyal to Ellen, but she is responsible.

As per her oath, Ellen had no loyalty to Charlotte, but if Charlotte was in danger, she would protect her with her life. She had no intention of abandoning her duties as a Guardian Knight.

Ellen and Charlotte stare at each other.

The two somehow became intertwined in a bizarre way.

This is where things came to a head, and we decided it was time to play some real games.

So, Charlotte kind of hates Ellen.

That goes for Ellen, too.

"You know you're a bit of an asshole, don't you?"

"You're a bit of a coward for coming all this way for a pitiful thing."

"Wow....... You're being mean, man. That's really bad, you!"

"You called me an asshole, so I thought I'd let you know what an asshole really is. I don't mean it."

"No, this shit is called a guardian knight......."

"Then get another article, minus Reinhardt."

"It's so annoying that Reinhardt and I were so close, and now we sound alike!"

"I guess we weren't close enough to even speak alike. Too bad."

"What, is this really....... Is this really......."

Charlotte and Ellen are bound together by their oaths as Guardian Knights, and they have grown to hate each other.

"Still, they're very grateful."

After grumbling, Ellen added, "I don't know.

"So, even if the rest of the world abandons you, I'll have your back."

He tells his lord that he has his own loyalties.

"...... leaves me speechless."

Charlotte, blushing slightly, turned away from Ellen and snapped.

\* \* \*

Ellen becomes Charlotte's Knight.

The engagement had been broken off. I spoke with the Emperor separately about that as well.

The Emperor still wanted to engage and marry Charlotte, which meant he was free to do so. In fact, he seemed to be hoping for it.

Naturally, I took a step back and realized that I probably didn't need to, given the circumstances.

It's a ridiculous situation. That I have the power to choose in this situation.

The engagement never happened, but that choice made a very significant difference in the way Ellen, I, and Olivia were presented to the world.

And Ellen and I hadn't really talked about it yet. In a different sense than last time, I didn't know what to tell her, and she didn't seem to know how to make the first move.

So.

After the swordsmanship lesson with Savior Tana, she left, but Ellen and I sat side by side on a bench in the waiting room, saying nothing.

Neither of us left the room, but we felt like we needed to talk about something.

But neither of us knew how to begin.

The whole thank you and sorry thing is weird.

I made a choice, and it was Charlotte.

Ellen sacrificed herself to make that choice.

So it's a little weird to say thank you.

So it's kind of weird to say sorry.

"......."

"......."

So Ellen and I haven't spoken in the days since her knighthood. Ellen chose me because of me, but she hadn't talked to me at all.

How long has it been.

Until it's nighttime and darkness falls on the windows looking out of the waiting room.

We didn't get to talk about anything.

I had to say something, so I finally spoke up.

"I am......."

"Promise me one thing."

But before I could open my mouth to speak, Ellen cut me off and walked in. Ellen looks at me.

"Just like last time....... Like last time....... Like last time......."

Tears welled up in Ellen's eyes as she said something.

"Well, lying is....... don't......."

The lie, presumably, refers to what happened on the island of Kamsencha.

Was it a lie, Ellen asked, and I said yes.

Ellen sobs.

"I know it's a lie....... I know it's a lie....... Of course. I know...... but......."

"Too....... too......."

"It hurt so bad......."

Ellen cries and pleads with me.

I was going to sacrifice something, and Ellen was going to sacrifice herself.

But I ended up taking a certain amount of risk by revealing my identity to the world.

Before I could sacrifice anything more to protect Charlotte, Ellen intercepted it.

Both of us, to a certain extent, carried the burden of protecting Charlotte.

There's only one thing Ellen wants from me.

I'm not asking you to choose me, and I'm not asking you to like me.

Just like last time.

Don't destroy yourself with lies, that's all I'm asking.

I can't say I like it.

I can't even say thank you.

It's probably not something you can fix by saying sorry.

"I'm sorry."

That's all I could say.

\* \* \*

Walking back to your dorm at night.

Ellen and I walked together with some distance between us. Guilt and obsession intertwined, and Ellen and I became a strange pair.

The engagement never happened, but even after Ellen told me about it, I was at a loss for words.

I can't go back to the way things were.

I wonder if I can just go back to normal and carry on as if nothing happened.

Do I deserve it?

Whatever I did, it didn't seem to work, so I was stuck doing nothing.

We walked back to our sophomore dorm in a daze.

I was about to go inside and rest, since it was night, when Ellen grabbed me by the collar. She looked at me, her usual nonchalant expression.

"Me, I'm hungry."

I said something like.

It was thrown out there like it was no big deal.

It was nothing.

Ellen would always say that casually, and after she said it, she would make something to eat.

A casual remark.

Soon.

Everyday words.

Now that the weirdness is over, let's get back to our normal lives.

Diligently clashing swords, overexerting themselves, and eating a lot of food before going to sleep.

Let's get back to those normal days.

Those simple words, Ellen's words of forgiveness, were a signal.

Let's go back to the way things were.

Let's live every moment together like it's nothing.

It's not that the guilt is gone, and it's not that something that's changed is back to normal.

However.

As if nothing has changed, as if you're not guilty of anything.

You can disguise it.

"Do you want anything to eat?"

"Stew. With beef."

"Okay. Let's eat."

"Do a lot."

"...... How much are you going to fuck up?"

How much do you want to eat.

Ellen was rather pleased to hear me say that.

"A lot, a lot."

Smiling, he said.

Episode 407.

Imperial Emperor Emperatos, Winter Palace.

"So, how does it feel to have the support of two warriors?"

"I can see that you're starting to get in the mood to take a pill, but I don't want to react to it."

Charlotte replied bluntly to Bertus's words.

"Who knows what would have happened if Ellen Artorius had become your guardian knight, if you had closed your eyes and gotten engaged to Reinhardt because you couldn't bite?"

Charlotte narrowed her eyes at Bertus's malicious sneer.

"I don't want to go down in history as the princess who was killed by her own knight, do you?"

Charlotte's nonchalant remark caught Bertus off guard.

"Do you really think Ellen would do that?"

"Maybe not, but at least Reinhardt will be disillusioned with me, I'm sure. I hate that more."

Bertus can't help but be dumbfounded by Charlotte's frank admission that she would rather be hated by Reinhard than die at the hands of a jealous Ellen.

He was never one to be overly outspoken about his feelings.

But after accepting defeat, Charlotte was in many ways overly candid.

"So what, you're not busy, you don't have anything to do, and you don't even like you, so why did you call your half-brother all the way to your palace?"

The current visit was the result of Bertus telling Charlotte to stop by the Winter Palace.

Charlotte's predicament now was that she had to come because Bertus had told her to come.

Support was solidified, but as long as Bertus knew that Charlotte's soul had been fused with the demon's, she would always be a fly.

"So, is there any progress in the study of the magical art of conjuring?"

Charlotte's expression hardened at that.

"You know what you're asking, don't you?"

"...... I know you don't like me, but I really don't know this time. All I know is that you've gotten a grimoire on seduction from somewhere and you're trying to do something with it."

Charlotte didn't understand Bertus's lack of knowledge. Charlotte was trying to keep it a secret, but Bertus had already gotten his hands on it and was playing with it.

If Bertus doesn't already know about the underground labyrinths of the Demon Castle, that's even more curious.

Bertus doesn't know what he needs to know.

That means the information is stuck in the middle.

"Lord Tana?

Tana is supposed to be neutral, but at some point, she's unknowingly siding with Charlotte.

It is possible that Saviolin Tana was somehow trying to keep the information about the conjugal art, which may have been Charlotte's final salvation, out of Bertus' ears.

As it turned out, Bertus had learned about the art of betrothal, but he didn't know that its source was the underground labyrinths of the Demon Castle.

Of course, Bertus may also know about the underground labyrinths of the Demon Castle.

However, if you somehow conceal the information that Charlotte, Tana, and Reinhardt traveled to the Demon King's Castle, you will not be able to make the connection between the spellbook on marriage and the underground labyrinth in the Demon King's Castle.

This means that Bertus is likely to have separate and distinct knowledge of both the Conjuration and the Underground Labyrinth.

If the information is properly blocked, there are only three people who know about the Demon Castle Underground.

Saviolin Tana, Charlotte herself, and Reinhardt.

Even the mages who studied the spell don't know where they got their grimoires, so while information about the spell can leak out, its source cannot.

The result of such a conjugal study.

"They say I have to live with it."

Charlotte had just gotten the results.

Bertus narrowed his eyes at Charlotte's calm words. By his reaction, it was clear that he was hearing this for the first time.

"Somehow, you don't seem too disappointed."

Indeed, Charlotte was nonchalant when she was told that her condition could not be reversed by the conjuration.

So there you have it.

That's all I had to go on.

Bertus's expression hardened.

"Brother, you may not believe it, but I am deeply sorry to have to kill you. Not long ago, I had only Reinhardt to blame, but now I have to blame Ellen Artorius. Even if it means I have to kill you, and even if the entire continent agrees with me. Basically, they're both assholes, and I think Reinhardt is just a lesser asshole, but Ellen Artorius is just as bad or worse than Reinhardt. It's not like I can't deal with them, of course, but when they kill you and then kill two warriors who are treated like the hope of humanity, I'm going to have to pray that they hang them painlessly?"

Bertus stammered, his expression a mixture of genuine annoyance and bewilderment.

"I'm almost tempted to thank the devil that I've gotten you into this mess."

Charlotte giggled, covering her mouth as if she were enjoying just imagining the trouble Bertus would be in after her death.

Bertus crosses his arms sullenly and glares at Charlotte.

"Hey brother, I think you're being a little too casual about it being over once you're dead. Consider my situation. I'm in the position of having to choose between killing you and giving my head to prevent the Warlord Valier from being reborn as a halfling, or allowing the Warlord to be reborn and shifting the continent's power to fight a legitimate Demon War without Ragan Artorius. Even the current Demon problem is another matter. If that happens, I'll be physically fine, but the stress will kill me, I'm sure."

It's a bit of a mixed bag, but Bertus wasn't exactly wrong.

If you kill Charlotte now, you will die.

Waiting for the demon to take full control of Charlotte's body would create a major event that would require slaying the resurrected demon, giving Bertus a just cause, but at a great cost.

Ellen has become her own knight and Reinhardt values her.

Two facts alone have made his life too heavy for him.

It was heavy, then light, then heavy again.

Charlotte found the change quite amusing.

Bertus's concerns are certainly valid.

"Well, I can't say for sure, and I don't know if you'll believe it or not, but....... but somehow I don't think that's going to happen."

"......Based on what?"

Reinhardt told me a few times.

It contains the salt of the world's only superpower, the spirit.

Nothing should happen.

You'll be fine.

Nothing should happen.

In the midst of so many whispers that seemed to bring peace to her heart just by hearing them, Charlotte was subconsciously convinced.

I'll be fine.

And since the power doesn't take away his will, maybe he's actually okay now.

It told me that.

Charlotte believes in Reinhardt.

He believes in this transformation of body and soul because he believes in the many whispers Reinhardt has given him.

"Obviously, I'll be fine."

"No, I mean, based on what?"

Charlotte looks at Bertus and giggles.

-rrrrr

"!"

Charlotte's hair turns black, and she takes on the appearance of a demon with bloodshot pupils and a vertical slit.

Bertus's complexion went white at the sight of the horrifying figure, its dark, flailing hair, and what he could only assume to be the form of a demon, a fiend.

"Look."

An eerie voice rang out, scratching at the darkness, and with a wave of her hand, dozens of dark spears appeared out of thin air.

The spears were aimed at Bertus, but they remained fixed in midair, unmoving.

"Something that doesn't kill you when I'm like this."

"No, you. What the hell is this......."

"Isn't that evidence enough on its own?"

Charlotte became one with the demon.

To be precise, you've gained full control over some of the demon's powers.

This is a gift from Reinhardt.

Without Reinhardt, I would have been dead, and with the added bonus of demonic power.

Engagement was not an option.

"Rather, why should I give this up?"

But at this point, it was the only thing she could count on.

\* \* \*

"If you were trying to scare me, you more than succeeded, brother."

Bertus nodded slowly, not exactly denying that he was frightened.

With that, Charlotte's fluttering hair settled back into place, and her eyes, as well as her hair, returned to their normal color.

"I can see you're scared. You should thank the devil."

"Why don't you stop making shitty jokes?"

To say she was scared is an understatement. Fainting is a fairly normal reaction when a perfectly healthy person suddenly sees a demonic figure trying to kill them.

Certainly, as far as Bertus could tell, Charlotte was not being controlled by the demon, but seemed to be in control of its power. Of course, he couldn't be sure if Charlotte was right, but he couldn't deny that she was stable.

Of course, it's a power that can't be displayed outwardly. Even those who don't know the details can agree that Charlotte is a very unpleasant and ominous figure when she reveals her true power.

It's a last resort.

It's just that Charlotte has one.

As powerful as this power is, it's impossible to survive as a continent's public figure, let alone the Empire's many knights. That's why the power to command so many armies with a single word is so frightening.

"Why did you bring that up? I don't think I asked you to post about it."

At Charlotte's question, Bertus crosses his arms and glares at her.

"Naturally, I'm curious as to your source. Where the hell did you get that grimoire on soul manipulation? Do you have some sort of secret society or connection?"

"Oh, was that it?"

We were able to figure out that Bertus knew about the Labyrinth, but he didn't know he'd been to the Demon Castle.

I could tell you where it came from. But he thought he was the only one who could break through the labyrinth with his demonic soul.

"Why, is there anything else?"

"Tell me what to do."

I'm not Bertus or Charlotte or a wizard.

They know that rare spellbooks are worth a fortune. And instead of being merchants who can turn it into money, they want to supply their army with that magic to boost their power.

Powerful magic is power, whether it's dangerous magic or dangerous sobriety, and it's a shame that the powerful have no power.

It doesn't matter if you tell Bertus the source. You're the only one who can get in there anyway.

But there's no reason to give it away.

You can't be emperor, but you can be in partnership with Bertus.

The things in the basement of the demon castle become Charlotte's property.

He lives in debt to Ellen, and in debt to Reinhard.

If, on his own, Bertus finds something useful in him, they may one day be able to stand face to face without debt.

"Okay. I'll get you a few more books then."

"Let's make a deal?"

"The fewer cards you have, the more you have to play with."

I said a few books, but Charlotte will bring you quite a few spellbooks.

It doesn't matter if you realize it's a vision of the Darklands, and then realize you found it in the basement of Demon Castle.

You're the only one who can get in there.

\* \* \*

"Uh......."

"......."

Herriot brushed past Reinhardt, who seemed to hesitate slightly upon seeing him.

I've been avoiding Reinhardt lately because I don't know what to say.

She saw Ellen and Reinhardt talking to each other as they had before. She saw Charlotte and Ellen, now Guardian Knights, bickering oddly, and then she saw the three of them walking around together.

Herriot couldn't figure out what to do.

When Reinhardt told her they were getting engaged, her head seemed to go blank.

I couldn't study, couldn't research.

Charlotte's life was in danger, so I couldn't tell her not to do it.

So, we'll just have to wait and see.

Just when you think you're going to have to walk away.

When Ellen became Charlotte's knight, the engagement became as untrue as a lie.

It was something he couldn't do himself.

Only Ellen Artorius, sister of Lagan Artorius and owner of Ramen, could do that.

Ellen's symbolism is even stronger than Reinhardt's, and by becoming Charlotte's knight, she can ensure Charlotte's safety.

Ellen did what he couldn't, so Reinhardt doesn't have to get engaged.

So, I guess I should be happy.

Herriot wasn't happy about it at all.

So when she saw Reinhardt getting back together with Ellen, she couldn't do it.

I know that if I approach them, make myself comfortable, and treat them like I used to, they'll treat me like I used to.

But.

After all, isn't that the end of the story?

Reinhardt always feels a little sorry for himself.

I'm sorry.

Sorry.

That's it.

You can't go any further than that.

I always thought I was next in line for Ellen.

It wasn't.

You were always last.

It's not about repairing relationships, it's about caring.

Sometimes Charlotte comes first.

Sometimes Ellen comes first.

Sometimes Olivia was first.

Self was always next.

The arrogant Herriot of old would have resented it, would have been angry. "I don't deserve this," she would have thought.

But once he sheds his arrogance, he decides to treat people as people, and he stays that way.

It was chipping away.

I know it's hard to have expectations, but this is enough. That's enough, that's enough, that's enough, that's enough, that's enough, that's enough.

Suddenly.

It's not about humility, it's about facing up to your fallen pride.

It's nice not to have to hold your hand.

Because you don't need a hug.

I find myself settling into a state of complacency, thinking that just being there is enough.

This is incorrect.

Settling for someone who doesn't like you to care about you out of guilt.

It's just miserable.

If you're only going to end up miserable and defeated, it's time to fold.

"Harriet, are you okay?"

"Huh? Ah....... Yeah."

At Adelia's worried words, Harriet nodded.

If it's not going to be reciprocated, let it go.

Reinhardt had risen too high for his own good. Maybe he's become something you can't even look at.

A seed sown in the soil of the mind grew and became a flower.

Just as a flower that doesn't bear fruit withers.

If it withers, only the heart should wither.

It was as if the soil in which the flower was rooted, even himself, was withering away.

\* \* \*

Herriot leaves the temple and heads for the palace.

As I do, I make a promise to myself.

Let's forget about it.

Slowly.

When it's over, when all the hurt feelings are gone, we can go back to being normal friends.

Reinhardt would want that, Herriot thinks.

Just as Riana is comfortable with Reinhardt because she doesn't like him, so should I be.

Let's talk about it after a very long time.

I liked you back then.

A lot.

I used to love it a lot.

"......."

She took to the streets, eventually bursting into tears in the middle of the street.

"Bad....... Bad....... bad guy......."

You know what I like.

We didn't really talk about it for fear of breaking something, but in the end, we all knew.

I couldn't bear to think about it. I would rather say something.

I could go on and on about how you're an asshole and the worst person in the world.

There's no reason to like him.

You know he's a terrible person, and you know it's your own fault for liking him.

I'd rather hate it, and then this feeling of inferiority and defeat will go away.

Let's hate it.

Let's just hate and hate and hate. Let's shoot you in the face and say you're an asshole and then walk away.

We'll be friends later? That's not going to happen.

With that vow, Herriot walked the streets, rode the horse-drawn train, and made his way to the palace.

Episode 408.

I want to distance myself from Reinhardt.

But I knew that the best way to clear my cluttered mind was to eventually get lost in something.

Memorizing complex magical formulas or facing difficult problems clears his mind. Herriot was no stranger to clearing his mind through study and research.

That's why she's been doing research.

Even that research, Reinhardt's proposed warp gate to the otherworld, was miserable, but it was all Herriot had to cling to.

After her day at the temple, Herriot headed to the palace.

Researching the warp gate system in the library of the Imperial Ministry of Magic was originally Reinhardt's idea, but it also intrigued Herriot.

A magic system that's been around for a long time.

It was an eye-opener in itself to understand such a vast system that had been touched by so many archmages.

Warp gate research requires a basic understanding of dimensional magic. As such, Herriot has developed his understanding to the point where he feels he could develop his own gate system on a small scale.

Due to recent events, the atmosphere around the temple has changed a lot.

-From the warrior.......

-It would be nice if you could come out of the temple.......

The chanting crowd has grown quite a bit, camped out in the temple.

The reason is to see Reinhard and Ellen, not the other way around.

Just as Reinhardt and Ellen were famous inside the temple and had people following them, so too were they outside the temple.

Most people didn't even know what Reinhard and Ellen looked like, so they wouldn't recognize them if they appeared outside the Temple, though the Temple guards were keeping a close eye on them in case the crowd became unruly.

-The Reincarnation of Artorius.......

Some people were saying things I couldn't understand. I had heard of a strange cult that believed in the reincarnation of Lagan Artorius.

I wonder if that's who's gathered here, if they believe Reinhardt's crazy stuff about being the reincarnation of Artorius.

Herriot couldn't understand people's weirdness.

However, there are consequences.

The hope of humanity.

Reinhardt, Ellen, and Olivia, who had become such a presence.

You are small and shabby.

There's no reason to be shabby, but if your opponent is too big, it's easy to lose heart.

So Herriot is about to give up.

Pushing through the crowds, Herriot made his way to the palace.

\* \* \*

Arriving at the Imperial Ministry of Magic, Herriot shook his head at the uncharacteristic atmosphere.

In front of the research library, a group of wizards huddled together, watching a stack of books.

-Here....... This is how.......

-Great.......

-Where the heck is......?

A considerable collection of spellbooks, and the mages poring over the materials before him seemed to be high ranking, not lowly members of the Ministry of Magic.

Herriot had been in and out of the Ministry of Magic, but he wasn't particularly close to the imperial wizards, and by the looks of it, they were talking about something important, so he headed straight for his usual reading room.

Herriot is barely acquainted with the wizards of the Ministry of Magic. They all know that the Grand Duchess is doing important research with imperial permission, so they don't approach her to talk to her.

The only familiar faces were the entrance manager controlling the desks and the officer stationed in Room 8.

The young wizard in front of her was someone who could advise her on understanding dimensional magic or help her find the resources she needed.

He was my research assistant and advisor, explaining the imaginary dimension to me.

Of course, Herriot wouldn't speak to her unless she needed to first.

Although they didn't know each other very well, Herriot realized that the wizard was quite friendly. Of course, he never asks her a question twice, but he does a good job of explaining things that she doesn't understand in detail and concisely.

I learned the name rather recently.

as Dwin, or so Herriot remembered.

However, the officer who had always greeted Herriot when he came in, even if he didn't speak to him afterward, would just sit there blankly, not even realizing that Herriot had entered.

There was no reason to pretend to know first, so he flinched at the sound as Harriet cautiously took a seat a good distance away.

"Ah, Grand Duchess, have you come?"

"Oh....... just now."

He was so preoccupied with something that he didn't even hear Herriot enter the room. When he did, he returned to his usual slightly smiling expression.

"It's been a while since you've been here."

"I've been a little busy."

It was more of an emotional thing than a work thing, but she doesn't really explain it.

"By the way, it's been unusually quiet outside."

Talking about it brought Reinhardt's face back into her head, so she forced herself to change the subject.

At the slightest hint of curiosity from Herriot, the young wizard smiled gently and glanced toward the entrance to the reading room.

"Oh, you mean like, a bunch of rare spellbooks were airlifted in from somewhere. It's not every day you find a bunch of rare arcane texts like that."

"Visionary......."

"Yes. The source seems to be classified for now, but I heard that a new labyrinth has been discovered in the Darklands, so maybe that's where it came from."

Labyrinth of the Darklands.

Herriot scratched his head, as this was the first he'd heard of it.

"A labyrinth?"

"Yeah, I don't think it's really broken through yet, but....... Apparently some adventurers have returned with a rare spellbook. It's supposed to be a tomb of a lich, but we don't know what kind of lich it is, but we expect it to be a fairly powerful one. Of course, if that many grimoires were found, the search for the tomb may already be over, but that's a lot of grimoires....... That's pretty rare.........."

As a closing statement, Dwin's demeanor was a bit nuanced.

I had vaguely assumed that he was just a sincere and intelligent person, but clearly there was something off about him now.

"I don't know if it's going to be my turn, but it would be nice to be able to take a look at it, although I suspect it probably won't be......."

I can't put my finger on it, but it's a weird feeling.

I don't know what it is about the look in his eyes, but there's something about them that makes people want to do business with him.

But that look isn't so special for a wizard.

It's only natural for a wizard to be interested in rare spellbooks.

But Rich's grave.

A large amount of arcane texts allegedly found there.

I don't know, but I'm sure there's some very powerful magic in there that the world doesn't know about.

Dangerous power.

However, a powerful force.

Herriot thought for a moment, then realized.

If you have too much dangerous knowledge, you will only become a too dangerous wizard.

Herriot echoed in his mind the words of the Grand Duke of St. Thuan.

"I'm curious, where on earth did you do that. Did you find some precious magic......."

Herriot couldn't help but feel that there was something a little off about the wizard's eyes as he spoke of the spellbook.

-Where the heck did they get it from....... replace.......

At the barely audible murmur, a chill ran down Herriot's spine.

\* \* \*

White Palace, Arnaria.

"Your Majesty, the documents you requested last time have arrived from the Society."

"Hmmm....... I guess."

The Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan is in his office in the palace, taking out a report brought by a messenger. As he reads it, the Grand Duke speaks in passing.

"I don't want the full text?"

"Yes, they said it wasn't top secret, but it would be considered association property."

"Funny, they're claiming ownership of magic they didn't invent."

The report the Archduke was looking at listed the books and outlined their contents.

A theory of formula simplification to increase the efficiency of fire spell composition.

How to improve and increase horsepower cohesion density.

Efficiently utilize your body's horsepower.

That's not the name of the book, but it's what the theories of magic in the book were based on.

I don't know if these theories will actually work, and I haven't seen the Grand Duke's grimoire, so I don't know if they're really theoretical.

"It is said that this much magical theory can be extracted from the Labyrinth, the supposed tomb of Lich, and the spellbooks that adventurers who wandered through it picked up along the way......."

There are many unexplored areas in the Darklands, and many dungeons that have yet to be properly explored. It's impossible to know all the dungeons, unexplored areas, and hazards.

The recently discovered tomb of Ritchie was one of those unexplored places. Normally, it wouldn't have been reported to the Archduke.

The important thing was the few spellbooks that the adventurers who had wandered in there and barely escaped had managed to grab.

Spellbooks are divided into theoretical books and spellbooks that cover magic.

Four species of spellbooks.

From there, I was able to come up with enough improvements to make it work, if not to overturn all the magical theories that had been used.

But the mere fact that such a grimoire describes a more efficient way of doing things than the way they've always been done is a great discovery. Not to mention the value of the spellbook itself, and its magical value.

Ritchie's Tomb.

It's not fully explored, it's more of a byproduct, and a few spellbooks contain it.

The last line of the report said.

-The Society is considering the possibility that an Akrich may be present in the dungeon.

Akriti.

It's a fantasy, like a dragon, the stuff of legend and universally believed to be non-existent.

To the extent that the association has to make such an irrational judgment, no one knows what really lies within the recently discovered tomb of Richie.

How long have you been studying magic, and do you have these spells?

So what does the real vision of that reach look like?

However, the nature of the Labyrinth in the Reach's dungeons is still unknown, and the Society and Guild have not yet made any direct moves, as they believe it could be very dangerous.

Wizards are usually cautious, and that goes for the Archduke as well.

Adventurers are like rainwater that follows the money anyway.

If they risk their lives to retrieve a grimoire, it can be purchased by an association, a guild, or someone like the Archduke. There's no reason to risk it yourself.

But.

If the grimoire falls into the hands of a guild or association, the Archduke will only be told that a discovery has been made. Wizards are also closed-minded, and wizards in guilds and associations are reluctant to share their visions, even among themselves.

It's not even good enough to give wizards outside the group a cursory acknowledgement of the achievement.

"Hmmm......."

It's best to take it before it's taken away.

But just as the Archduke thinks this, so too might an association, a guild, and eventually an empire.

If a group of adventurers, mages, mage guilds, or the imperial government organizes a dungeon hunting party, even if it's just Akrich's tomb, it will be dug.

What's really in this tomb.

Dangerous knowledge only makes for dangerous wizards.

And.

The Labyrinth, which is sure to harbor many dangerous spells, will give birth to countless dangerous mages.

You need to know the true nature of the labyrinth.

To prevent dangerous magic from being released into the world.

"Tell the wizards to get ready."

"Yes, Your Highness."

The Archduke hadn't been out in a while.

Episode 409.

"No, you mean you just finished this?"

At Dwyn's words, Herriot nodded nonchalantly.

"Oh....... Yeah."

"Grand Duchess, it's not that simple, you've just changed the history of the Warp Gate, and in doing so, you've changed the history of the continent."

"Oh....... Is that so?"

Dwynn's excitement was palpable, but Herriot's wasn't so much.

"You've solved a problem that countless warp gate theorists have refused to touch. You may rejoice some more, some more!"

Dwyn's voice rang out in the deserted reading room. It was an intense response that was a bit out of character for his usually calm demeanor, but it didn't seem all that real to Herriot.

It's not an easy problem by any means, so I did a little research and solved it. That was it.

"Grand Duchess, I don't suppose you realize what you've accomplished?"

"What? Ah....... If the maps of the imaginary dimension are reorganized the way they are now, instead of having to go through several warp gates to reach your destination, you'll be able to travel from a small gate at the north end of the continent to a small gate at the south end of the continent in one fell swoop....... Isn't that how it works?"

"If you know this, why aren't you surprised?"

"......."

Herriot opened his mouth to say something, then shut it.

It's not that I'm brilliant, it's just that I've been using warp gates so stupidly up until now.

That would be disrespectful to every wizard in history who has ever built this system, so Herriot couldn't do it.

And, for the same reason, I couldn't say why I hadn't done this before.

As with most technological advances, Herriot was born out of frustration.

While the warp gate system offers tremendous convenience, it also comes with its own set of inconveniences.

A good way to think of it is that small warp gates have a range of 1, medium warp gates have a range of 2, large warp gates have a range of 3, and extra large have a range of 4.

Since a warp gate is connected to all warp gates within its range, a very large warp gate will naturally be connected to a very large number of warp gates.

So the giant warp gate was basically connecting the entire continent by building another giant warp gate at the end of the crossroads.

However, there is an inherent problem with this approach: to travel very long distances, you need to go through a gate multiple times. Not all places on the continent are connected by an intersection of large warp gate ranges, so you may have to travel through a series of small and medium-sized gates.

To travel from the ecliptic gradient to a base town on the southern edge of Cairnstadt, you must first travel from the ecliptic's large warp gate to the Cairnstadt large warp gate to the provincial large warp gate, then from there to the provincial medium warp gate, then to the destination small warp gate.

This is the way it should be. This is a very extreme case, but not necessarily the only one.

Inevitably, there would be bottlenecks at the larger, more crowded warp gates, as there are now, and there would be queues at the larger warp gates.

Reinhardt and Ellen's imperial crest, which is a warp gate free pass, gives them an enormous time advantage because of the way the warp gate system is structured for waypoint passage.

But Herriot ran into a fundamental problem: He couldn't understand why anyone would want to exit and re-enter a warp gate that was interconnected like a spider's web.

Instead of arriving at a warp gate waypoint and getting off, why not just use the connected dimensional gateway and go straight to your destination, skipping the transit?

Herriot pointed out why warp gates don't work that way, and Rosser-Dwin's answer was simple.

Because that's what we've been doing.

Of course, there are a lot of problems with that statement alone.

The warp gate didn't just fall out of the sky and connect the entire continent, but rather it was perfected little by little as we went through trial runs one after another. In other words, the basic system was created with no intention of connecting the entire continent from the beginning, but it happened by accident.

The maps of the phantom dimensions used for the direct connection to the warp gates had been built up slowly in the same way, and the complexity of the system had been built up over hundreds of years by countless wizards.

With so many people involved, it was inevitable that there would be issues.

If you think of it like building a road, some people build the route in a straight line, some people build it in a curve, some people build it in an ellipse, and some people build it in a spiral - each in their own way.

Each wizard drew the map in their own way, and that's how it's used, and you can't fix it unless you want to fix it, and if you mess with it, you break the whole warp gate system.

With maintenance after maintenance, and more fudged magical theories and formulas added, the system based on false dimensional maps and warp gates was a giant turd. They were maintained, but not improved, in a way that kept them in their current form and usage.

So it's not that many warp gate technicians didn't improve on Herriot's idea, it's that they couldn't. They'd have to do the crazy thing of understanding all of the centuries-old structure of the warp dimension, redrawing the warp gate's map of the warp dimension connecting all of the continents from scratch, and tearing apart the basic workings of the warp gate.

But then Herriot did it.

She's even shocked by the news that Reinhardt is getting engaged, sobbing to herself, saying she's having a hard time focusing.

To put it simply.

Herriot has taken a small warp gate that is now a rural neighborhood eyesore and made it function like a giant warp gate in front of a temple, crusade, or imperial palace.

No, it's more than that.

The largest warp gates have range, but if we were to apply the imaginary dimensional map that Herriot envisioned, we would be able to travel directly to any warp gate in the common range of the warp gate system.

This means that you can travel anywhere on the continent, even if you can't get to the Edina Archipelago, which has its own small warp gate system.

"You may rejoice a little more, Grand Duchess!"

"Well, even if you say so......."

They say that grief fuels growth.

This magical genius didn't get along with his crush, so he sulked in his room, scribbled in his notebook, and changed history.

In conclusion, Herriot's new warp gate-based system and imaginary dimensional maps should solve all the problems of warp gate operation once and for all. Of course, it cannot be applied immediately, so it needs to be verified and piloted, and its stability needs to be verified by experts through trial and error.

Herriot had already accomplished what no other archmage had ever done.

Herriot realizes that this is a very important research accomplishment, but he doesn't understand Dwin's excitement because it wasn't that difficult for him.

So, a natural conclusion.

'I'm a genius.......'

Herriot realized with a start.

"It would have been fun to get to know the Grand Duchess sooner."

"?"

Dwynn's words had an oddly disconcerting effect on Herriot.

This guy is just not himself today.

Herriot felt a strange sense of discomfort, but he didn't know what it was yet.

"The Grand Duchess's five stars are enough to make you shudder. Now, here's your next piece of research."

When Herriot looked flustered, he changed the subject.

"Ah, yes....... Thank you."

"No, genius is fun to watch."

Genius.

It's a phrase she's heard over and over again, and by her own admission, she wondered what it meant.

To say that he is the greatest genius in the history of magic is simply an understatement; he still has a lot to learn, and he knows people who are far ahead of him in their fields and motivations.

You can't be the hope of humanity. You cannot stand side by side.

We've developed innovative ways to use the Warp Gate, but it has nothing to do with power.

The inferiority complex of genius.

What the heck can you do with lead research?

She didn't want to get anything out of it, she just needed a place to focus her mind.

I ended up coming up with an improvement to the warp gate system, but that's not the real goal.

Figuring out how to create a portal to the other world doesn't make Reinhardt look good.

It doesn't change anything.

Like last time, they might try to hide it, saying it's too dangerous.

The officer looked at Herriot with an amused gaze.

You may call yourself a genius, but the person in front of you is not. No one who manages the Imperial Ministry of Magic's research library at such a young age is anything less than a genius.

In the world's perception, wizards are geniuses, and this young wizard, who is the head of the Ministry of Magic at a young age, is probably a genius among wizards, so to hear him called a genius is quite something.

It's just that there's no way he's going to be able to top that.

"By the way, I haven't asked this before because it's rude, but may I ask you a question?"

"What? Ah....... Yes."

"The Grand Duchess is not going to be a warp gate technician, so why are you studying warp gate systems?"

It was a valid question.

While it is true that the mages involved in the Warp Gate are quite high ranking, it is, after all, far too practical a magic for the Grand Duchess of the Duchy of Saint-Tuan to study.

Herriot reflects on why he started this research.

Portals to other worlds, dimensional magic, and, if dimensional magic, warp gates.

It was simple cause and effect. It's just that it wasn't his curiosity.

How would they react if you said, "I want to know how to get to the other world.

She thinks it's something to be laughed at, but in the end, what can you do, so she chuckles.

"I was wondering if there was a way to get to the other world."

"......Yes?"

The other person, understandably, looked puzzled, as if he hadn't expected the answer at all.

Herriot scratched his cheek at how ridiculous it sounded.

"After all, there is no such thing, is there?"

I've been catering to Reinhard's inquisitive mind. If I'm going to stay away from Reinhard, I might as well stop helping him with this.

Herriot thinks so.

"It's....... We don't know if this world exists or what it's like....... I'd say it's more like uncharted territory than nothing at all......."

The wizard in front of you looks dumbfounded, mumbles something, and then shakes his head.

"Maybe, just maybe, we have similar aspirations."

Another unknown sound.

Does this person want to open a portal to the otherworld?

But with a questioning smile on his face, not his usual easygoing smile, Herriot couldn't be sure of anything.

"I think you've been saying some strange things."

Herriot didn't hold back this time, but Lothar Dwyn naturally scratched his head.

"Haha, maybe I'm getting a little carried away, I keep stumbling over my words."

What do I mean by excited?

"But, Grand Duchess, what about that idea?"

"What idea?"

"The idea that it would be easier to create this world than to create a portal to another world."

What an incomprehensible statement: it's better to create a world than a portal to another world.

"Of course, it would be impossible for a clumsy wizard like me, but wouldn't it be possible for you, the Grand Duchess, to do it alone, as you are the most powerful wizard in the world, and you are certainly capable of becoming the God of the New World......."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

Herriot interrupted Dwin mid-sentence.

Herriot had a strong feeling that this man was telling a story that only he knew, and therefore only in his head.

An unexplained malaise had been building in the back of his mind.

Man, I didn't realize this, but I had a very bad feeling.

It's not your usual nonchalant demeanor, but rather a slight stutter, a subtle outburst of bullshit, and a look that makes your intentions hard to read.

Herriot's instinct was to leave.

This guy is dangerous.

Herriot didn't want to talk anymore.

"I have to go now, it's getting late......."

"That's too bad, Grand Duchess."

Lothar Dwyn smiled as he watched Herriot rise from his seat with a slight glare.

"I wanted to talk to you just a little bit longer today, how about a little bit longer......."

"We can talk about ...... later, it's too late for that today."

"Oh....... Is that right?"

He said it, but he didn't look convinced.

That was the clincher.

If he doesn't want to talk, he's going to force it. Herriot felt his blood run dry at the sudden turn of events.

A slight, wry smile tugged at Dwyn's lips as he rose from his seat, shivering slightly.

"Well, bye."

He only bowed deeply toward Herriot.

Herriot ran out of the reading room.

An unidentifiable sense of crisis coursed through Herriot's body.

Episode 410.

Leaving the palace, Herriot quickened his pace.

The intense sense of discomfort I felt at being so different from someone I had considered a good advisor soon turned into an eerie sense of dread.

He hadn't actually done anything to her, but she could tell from their few conversations that he wasn't a normal mage.

It seems to follow.

I can almost feel it.

You keep hearing strange noises and saying things to yourself that you don't understand.

From wishing I'd known you sooner, to feeling like you're crossing the line and almost deifying Chuukseum, to the utterly incomprehensible bullshit about being the new god of the world.

No sane wizard would say that.

Herriot is a wizard who has taken the elite course.

While wizardry is basically the work of geniuses, there are also street wizards, and there are definitely people who learn magic from street wizards.

They are usually lunatics and geeks.

Herriot had heard the stories, and he knew that there were plenty of lunatics out there who took pleasure in tormenting those who had no talent for magic by forcing them to learn it.

Soon.

Throughout his life as an elite mage, Herriot has had little experience with crazed mages. For one thing, her father was an archmage, and the people who taught her magic were generally clean wizards with sound minds.

Herriot's first and last case of insanity was that of Aaron Mede, who had been building chimeras in the basement of his mansion.

So it's no wonder I was gripped with an unexplained sense of dread today when the seemingly unharmed Lothar Dwin started making strange noises.

It certainly wasn't the legendary villain of the evil wizard that I'd heard about from my brother and father when I was younger than I am now.

But Herriot was feeling in real time how terrifying it is to face someone with unmeasurable madness.

Herriot kept looking back as he walked.

Maybe he's following you.

I used to think it was obsessed with me.

What are you going to do to me if you follow me?

The pace quickened, and on the horse-drawn train back to the temple, even among the passengers, Herriot broke out in a cold sweat.

Nothing happened, but it felt like something was going to happen.

Even though he knew it was just a phase, Herriot couldn't help but feel nervous.

The strange way he looked at himself.

If you get a glint in your eye when you talk about spellbooks, it's called Desire.

A bunch of bullshit that makes no sense whatsoever.

Hoping for God's sake that the crazed wizard wasn't trying to do her any harm, Herriot stepped off the train and headed back to the temple at a near running pace.

Crossing the temple gates gave Herriot some relief, but it wasn't enough.

It was nighttime, so the tram was slow.

She looked around in a cold sweat as only a few students slowly boarded the tram and went about their business.

The thought of being caught up in the unthinkable, of being the target of a mad wizard, made my blood run dry.

It's probably just a whim. I've been on edge lately, and I'm just overreacting to things.

But it was hard to say no to Dwin, because all the things he'd told me were bizarre.

In her confused and frightened state of mind, Harriet finally reached the stop for the Royal Class dormitory and stepped inside.

And.

Returning to the sophomore dormitory For a brief moment, Harriet felt the dread and fear that had been consuming her dissipate.

"Uh......."

Reinhardt, freshly washed and with a towel around his neck, walked toward the lobby and made eye contact with himself.

Reinhardt stutters a bit, as he always does these days, but doesn't end up talking to himself.

Well, there's Reinhardt.

With Reinhardt, you have the confidence that he'll do something about it.

I hate to admit it, and I probably shouldn't.

The moment I saw Reinhardt's face, the anxiety that had been gripping my heart vanished like a lie.

"ah......."

As soon as she saw Reinhardt, she reflexively relaxed, and her legs gave way.

-Whoosh!

"Uh, dude, come on!"

Reinhardt quickly caught her before she could fall to the ground. Herriot bit his lip as Reinhard supported him.

Obviously, there are many people stronger than Reinhardt, and many people more trustworthy than Reinhardt.

Why does this guy's face give him such a strong sense of relief.

"Why am I getting such a cold sweat......."

Reinhardt hesitates, but can't help himself, and carefully studies Herriot's complexion.

Why it's reassuring to see Reinhardt.

Herriot could see why.

That's because he's an asshole.

He's a crazy man who'll do anything to protect someone he cares about, including getting engaged to Charlotte because he thinks her life is in danger.

He's an asshole who knows he's hurting the people around him, but he does it anyway.

So.

If something happens to me, I'll do the same thing I did with Charlotte.

That he would do it somehow, anyhow, any way.

He's an asshole, an unscrupulous asshole.

He's always made it work, so he'll make it work this time.

That's why Herriot was so relieved to see Reinhardt.

Herriot would rather hate Reinhardt.

"Hey....... Come on. What happened?"

I wanted to hate it.

I actually hate it.

But as much as I hate him, I believe in Reinhardt.

"I don't know....... I don't know, I don't know why I'm doing this......."

And because I love Reinhardt more than I hate him.

"Just....... Just....... Just stay like this for a while. Just stay like this for a while......."

"Uh, huh? Uh....... Uh. Oh, okay......."

In the end, Herriot could not have hated Reinhardt more than he did.

\* \* \*

"You think it's an illusion?"

"......Yes. Now that I think about it, it was just me freaking out, nothing happened."

This what.

I thought she was in the middle of something serious, but she assured me it was nothing.

"No, just....... You keep telling me I'm a genius, and I keep thinking....... There's a guy like that....... Something. I should say I'm a little suspicious. He said some weird things, but I think it was just him being weird and....... I don't know what to say, I just got scared and didn't realize that......."

"Delusional?"

Her face turned bright red at my words.

"Uh....... Delusional, one....... I think......."

What it is.

Did our cutie have some kind of axe-man property or something, according to the Lucinyl way of speaking? I don't think so.

"I just feel like he's coming after me, I feel like he's following me. I was scared....... But now that I think about it, he's kind of a weird guy....... It's not like he's ever done anything bad to me or intentionally asked me for anything....... They're wizards, they're all weird in their own way....... Now that I think about it, he's not that weird, but I guess I just got the wrong idea......."

It's cute that you're so embarrassed that you're mangling your pronunciation.

And it's nice to be able to look at them without feeling too guilty.

In the end, the research assistant who had been so helpful up to this point was so freaked out that she left and ran off to Temple, wondering if she was being a little too self-congratulatory.

I don't know what the hell he was talking about, but it's not every day that a wizard says something outlandish.

By the way.

I didn't know what to do, wondering if I should move away from Herriot, but she reached out to me first.

Thank goodness it's not a big deal. My heart sank as I thought something serious had happened.

If you're mistaken, you're welcome.

It's the illusion that allows me to talk about it in such a normal way.

Harriet and I were now sitting across from each other in the dining room.

I met Harriet right after I washed up from my duel with Ellen.

"......."

"Ah, Ellen......."

So, naturally, it was a natural progression for Ellen to come to the restaurant after her shower to grab a bite to eat.

Ellen looked back and forth between me and Herriot as we sat across from each other, then sat down next to Herriot.

As if it were a given.

"Do you want anything to eat?"

Our chum asks, almost with a glint in his eye.

"I'll make it for you today."

Apparently, she's really enjoying the return of this composition. Harriet is at a loss for words when she sees Ellen like that.

Vaguely smiling, vaguely crying.

With a complicated expression.

"Me, I'm....... stomach, are you hungry?"

"What the hell you."

And then I heard a voice behind me, quite unfamiliar to be heard in a Class A dorm, even at this late hour.

"Is this what you call a knight telling his lord to come and get him?"

Charlotte, arms crossed, looked nervously at Ellen.

No, Ellen called Charlotte herself?

"I'm a good cook, let me make you something."

"My knight doesn't need to be that good with a sword."

"I don't have to do one or the other, it's better than you doing neither."

"Really? How do you know I can't cook, you've never seen me?"

"Of course he can't do it, he grew up in an environment where he couldn't do it."

"......Yes, you can't! You can't! You can't! And you called me to argue, in the middle of the night?"

"I brought you in to feed you, and you're the one who's arguing, and I'm trying to take care of myself, and you're making me look bad."

"......who do you think you are for being an asshole?"

Ellen points at me with a wordless gesture.

No, I don't think he does, but he can scratch a person pretty good.

Spin?

"Wow....... Now you're pissing me off without saying a word?"

"Getting angry easily, that's a disease."

I've been seeing this composition a lot lately.

Charlotte and Ellen have a different feel than Ellen and Olivia, which is a bad match.

And Ellen, it's like when she's talking to Charlotte, she's talking a lot, but when she's arguing with Olivia, she's like, "Fuck off," "No.

"Anyway, what do you want to eat?"

Charlotte giggled at Ellen's question.

"Beef Bourguignon."

What do I do?

Our 1Queen has started a subtraction?

But what came next was even worse.

"Please only use tenderloin. I usually like fatty stuff, but I'm on a diet. And spices. Especially no pepper. I despise chefs who try to cover up their shoddy work by slapping on spices. The wine is a red from Risile......."

"Eat what you're given, not what you deserve."

Ellen spat out my thoughts verbatim.

Of course, Charlotte's face turned bright red when she heard that.

"What, you suck?! Did you just call me a dick?"

"I'm saying face value is face value because face value is face value. You're pretty, so I'm saying you're picky enough to be pretty."

"Uh....... Huh? What? What?"

"When in doubt, eat what you're given."

"Hey, hey, hey, it's running away!"

"I'm not running away, I'm going to the kitchen."

Ellen went into the kitchen, not wanting to hear any more of Charlotte's babbling, and Charlotte began to watch her from behind to see what she was doing.

Harriet had been watching Ellen and Charlotte's argument with me, mouth agape.

"Hey....... You know......."

"I think I know what you're trying to say."

"I think you and I did that last year......."

The context of the conversation is different, but Charlotte's confusion as she wonders what she's hearing and Ellen's pounding on her nonetheless are me and Harriet Fanbak from last year.

That wasn't the only similarity.

-I said no carrots!

-eat.

-Are you sure you don't want it?

-I'm holding a knife.

-With....... You're really just getting out, aren't you......?

"Reinhardt....... I'm feeling a little dizzy......."

Harriet sagged against the table and whined as she listened to Ellen and Charlotte bicker, which made her dizzy just to hear.

"Actually....... I haven't gotten used to it yet either."

The conversation between the two of them is a mess, not in the sense of identity or anything.

Ellen finished her beef brguignon and coloneled it in front of us, while Charlotte crossed her arms and snorted.

"I'm sorry, remember when I said I was on a diet? What do you think I'm going to eat after eleven o'clock at night? Think about it."

Yes.

I thought you might be like this.

Ellen glares at Charlotte as she turns away from the food with a "hmmm".

That.

That one with the mouth popping out.

"......Well, I'm not eating."

Charlotte looked at Ellen's gaping mouth and eyes and muttered to herself, trying to look away.

"......."

As if to say, if you don't eat, I won't eat, Ellen glared at Charlotte with her mouth full.

They'll be sad.

He'll feel really bad if you don't eat it.

It's almost a coercive glare.

"Oh, okay, you can eat it!"

I think Charlotte really wasn't going to eat it, but she was forced to because of Ellen.

"......Hmm, that sounds good in moderation."

The line was so obvious it was almost shocking, and Harriet blushed, wondering if I was feeling the same way about Charlotte.

"Me, me....... Never again....... I'll never say that again....... Heh, or....... Heung-rae......."

Yes.

You're cute enough without saying that line.

\* \* \*

Now that Ellen has become Charlotte's knight, there are occasional moments like this, and while she hasn't reconciled with Harriet, a subtle misunderstanding on Harriet's part has brought the four of them together in Class A dormitory.

We had just enough time for tea after eating Ellen's cooking.

Ellen and Charlotte automatically whined when left alone. When they started bickering, Harriet would clutch her temples and try her best not to listen.

Of course, that wasn't the only story.

"....... What did I hear wrong?"

"You were right about increasing the efficiency of gate utilization."

"No. So that....... within the warp gate zone, you're going to move them all at once?"

"I don't know if it works in practice, but in theory it does. I don't know if you'll understand, but I've built something similar in design."

Charlotte asked Herriot if he'd gotten anything out of his research at the Ministry, and Herriot simply replied that he hadn't.

That story surprised me too.

We're making the warp gate a one-time trip to get to your destination instead of a series of trips.

Charlotte looks at Harriet with a nervous look on her face.

"First of all, if what you say is true and it really does happen....... Wow, I can't even begin to imagine how much that would change."

Charlotte also found it daunting to calculate the ramifications of streamlining and simplifying warp gate usage.

Ellen just shakes her head in disbelief, and I can't help but think that we're the best.

When you think about it, Herriot's discovery is a Power Cartridge or Moonshine-level disruption. I just don't recognize it because it's not in my range of expectations.

It was a discovery of great national interest, and Charlotte seemed to be giving serious thought to Herriot de Saint-Ouen's talent as the greatest genius in the history of magic.

Ellen, Harriet, and Charlotte.

The picture of the three of them huddled together talking was unfamiliar, but it didn't look too bad.

"What's she up to these days?"

As the three of us chatted awkwardly, as if we knew each other, Ellen turned to me at the end and asked.

Then Charlotte and Harriet looked in my direction, interested.

That.......

You're not wrong to ask me how Olivia is doing.

But it was interesting that Ellen wanted to know about it.

I wonder if I'm finally starting to feel a sense of togetherness, of sharing the same fate as the owner of the relic.

Olivia never explained to me if she thought it was a bad thing to say or what she was going through.

Moreover, there were so many days when he was away from the temple that it was hard to see him.

"I heard that you work as an inquisitor, but....... I don't know the details."

All we know is that Olivia is on a quest for clues to the cult.

If I reveal that I'm a demon, Olivia will be on my side and keep my secret.

But when Olivia makes that choice, she's asking to be an enemy of humanity.

I'd rather have Olivia on no one's side than have her on my side and be in danger. No, I'd rather Olivia think of the demon as her enemy. That way, she won't make herself the enemy of an unspecified number of people.

It's better for Olivia to see an insubstantial demon as her enemy than to have her join the demon's side and become an enemy of humanity. As long as I avoid her, that is.

"Inquisitor?"

The word itself has an ominous ring to it, and everyone was stunned.

To the sophomores in the Royal Class, Olivia is seen as a dysfunctional senior, but they don't realize that Olivia Ranze was once a saint.

That's why they were surprised to learn that Olivia was an inquisitor, a person who captures, kills, and tortures people.

The engagement and the myriad of changes that followed changed the entire continental landscape and changed our relationship.

The smallest of those small changes.

We ended up sitting here in the middle of the night, four of us, talking.

It wasn't shattered.

But in this bizarre relationship of what was clumsily broken and what was clumsily stuck.

I could feel a precarious little peace.

Episode 411.

-Bang!

A dimly lit space with the sound of ripples tearing through the air echoing here and there.

The whip breaks the speed of sound with each stroke, creating a rippling sound that tears through the air. The sound is intimidating in itself, but those who are struck are in even greater danger.

Those struck by the flesh-ripping whip can't even scream when it's that bad.

A person who has been tortured to death.

Looking at the condition of the men, some of whom she couldn't tell if they were dead or alive, Olivia saw them stretched out in the cage, Sutton already dead.

"This way."

Olivia was being led somewhere by a man dressed as an Inquisitor.

The basement of the Crusader Headquarters.

There were more people than usual in the huge interrogation room.

Olivia had been in and out a few times, and had even been nearly dragged back here by her foster parents.

But now, Olivia was here in her capacity as a special inquisitor.

"What did they all get caught for?"

At Olivia's question, one of the interrogators in the lead role clicked his tongue.

"The times are suspicious, and not only is there demonism, but strange folk witchcraft and idolatry here and there. Whether they believe in the existence of local legends, or worship unheard-of cults that are not demons at all, or......."

"Do you have a group of martialists who believe in Lagan Artorius?"

"They are the most troublesome, heresy to be sure, but......."

"So you're saying it's a hard problem to touch."

"Yes, I don't know about after the papal conclave, but you're still....... out of their hands."

As anxiety and fear spreads, a number of folk religions have sprung up, not just warrior religions and demonic religions.

Dragonism is the largest of the cults, and while it requires a quick hand, it can lead to mass civilian slaughter if you mess it up.

Not only would that put them at odds with the Empire, but it would also turn the people against the Five Great Houses.

The name of Lagan Artorius is very heavy and huge. It is said that he saved mankind and ascended to sit at the right hand of the gods, but even if it were not true, who would dare to claim it?

It was a situation that could lead to the ridiculous scenario of the Church of God becoming the enemy of humanity.

Thus, minor heresies were brought into these interrogation chambers before they could spread, demanding repentance and making the heretics vomit out their information, but not yet the martial heretics who could be seen on the streets.

Olivia found the situation hilarious.

Following the outbreak of the Demon War, the Five Great Houses of God formed an allied force of all the Houses of God called the Crusader Knights.

It was pretty good. It was a symbiotic relationship, but once they had an organization that represented their collective interests, they had a general body of believers with five times the voice, five times the power, and five times the influence.

The leader of the Crusader Knights even gained a level of influence and power comparable to that of the Pope of each of the Five Great Houses.

It was created in the name of defeating demons, but now that the demons are gone, it's not going away, even though it should.

So much so that former crusader leader Leviathan Lance even planned to establish a theocracy.

However, the reappearance of the Devil has turned the tables.

The devil didn't do something himself.

People driven mad by the terror of the demons have created a fictional faith called Dragonism, which has become a threat to the Five Great Houses.

As for the establishment of a theocratic state, the Five Great Shinto religions now have to worry about their survival in the face of the insubstantial faith of the warrior religion.

Moreover, the presence of Ellen Artorius and the new master of Alsbringer, Reinhardt, only increases the prestige of the Order rather than diminishes it.

Did you not say.

That a warrior will return.

Reinhard, the Second Coming, and Ellen Artorius, a kinswoman of the warrior, will save us.

Religion is all about fitting beliefs into reality, and those who believe in Mercenaryism will proclaim that their appearance is somehow the fulfillment of the prophecies of Mercenaryism. Mercenary religion expands.

No dogma, no denomination, no parish, no temple, no pope.

A plague will sweep the continent in the name of the fiery religion of the warrior.

The Five Great Lords.

It may end up in the hands of the crowd, not the devil.

Did the Devil foresee this when he attacked Leviathan?

If he killed Leviathan because he knew it would happen, then the Devil is something else, a genius for lack of a better word.

Even human insanity and fear are factored into the calculation.

If so, it could be that he sensed signs of a warrior religion after killing Reverie Lance, and attacked Raziern to amplify it.

A trigger for the murder of Revere Lance.

A bomb called the Primary Raziern Raid.

That's what exploded in the current demonic raid.

A few guerrilla wars later, the Five Great Houses were faced with a crisis: a revival of warrior religions.

I wonder if the devil really knew this would happen.

Olivia can't see that.

However, Olivia decided to do what she had to do.

You don't have to choose me.

If it makes you laugh, so be it.

If it makes you happy, so be it.

Honor Reinhardt.

If I had to be a monster to do it, so be it.

"This is it."

It's not a place where you can see right through the bars like you can in other places.

A massive cell blocked by a massive stone wall.

Outside, numerous magical guards and protectors prevent interference from the outside and escape from the inside.

If there are important people among the pagans, these are the cells where they are kept.

-curl!

The Inquisitor manipulated something. A stone wall opened, revealing a cell.

A mangled pagan was there, head bowed, unconscious.

"It's not fake, is it?"

This question was important to Olivia, who had already seen people trying to hang non-believers in the provinces, and priests actually joining in to create false victims.

You don't want to interrogate someone who's a hardass.

"I'm sure of it. It's not a villager, it's a priest who can use the holy power of the demons. He doesn't speak, though, and since he's a priest, he must have some special training."

From what Olivia could see, it was clear that the torture hadn't been done by conventional means. It was clear that she was quite resistant to mental magic, as well as anti-magic.

"Okay, everybody out."

"What? He's dangerous. You two are alone......."

"Do I need to say it twice?"

Olivia stared at them, and they swallowed hard.

Somehow, beneath his gentle expression, there was an eeriness that was as sharp as a knife.

An apostle of Tuan who was once a renowned saint of Eredian who abandoned her faith and returned with the Tiamata.

Going against her will could be considered an act against the will of God. Not even the Pope or the Crusaders could treat a champion who had been chosen by a holy object lightly.

"Yes, just in case......."

"You know it, so get out."

At Olivia's simple command, the stone wall doors closed and darkness fell over the stone chamber.

-Whoops

Olivia waved her hand, and the light that appeared illuminated the stone chamber.

The torture of the Inquisition is not for the faint of heart.

The torture of the priests is not in the pain, but in the restorative power they can wield.

Even if you think you're going to lose your mind, even if you think you're going to lose a limb, even if you're about to go into hemorrhagic shock.

The priests restore the body to its original state and begin the torture all over again.

That's why most of the time you're just spitting out the truth, or at least the lies, to get the Inquisitors to say what you want them to say.

A priest of a fiendish religion who never came clean.

Olivia pulled up a chair across from the shrunken, unresponsive demonist and sat down.

"Why don't you look up when you're awake?"

"......."

The other person didn't respond.

"I'm not good at torture, I'm a quack, and if I torture you, you'll die."

At Olivia's crisp but murderous words, a cracked voice rang out from the bowed heathen.

"Kill......."

The answer was simple.

Even death is not free here. It's very hard to kill yourself, even harder when you're tied up, and if you try to die, the priests will bring you back.

Torture where not even death is allowed.

That's the difference between a real inquisition and a bullshit inquisition like the one in Raziern.

"How easy it is to say something like that when you've been tortured so badly. Poor thing."

Olivia stares at the bowed heathen.

"Still, I'm a little different from the interrogators we've had so far."

In the light.

Olivia holds out her right hand in front of the bowed heathen.

-Shoooooooo

"I can wield demonic power, and I'm pretty good at it."

In Olivia's right hand, a dark, ethereal energy flowed, different from the white light in the room.

"We're on the same side."

Pagan, head held high, looks at Olivia in disbelief.

Demons and demigods have the same source of power.

Olivia felt bad for the countless arguments, heartaches, and deaths that resulted from not knowing, or not wanting to admit it.

Olivia will take advantage of it.

Olivia is a priestess of Tuan and a priestess of Kier.

So you can open a mouth that never opens unless you're an ally, and you can open it any number of times.

"Now, are you in the mood to talk?"

Olivia, who has lit up the room with the power of purity, stares at the pagan with the power of corruption all over her.

"Oh....... Lord......."

To the pagan eye, it must have looked like an image of a god.

\* \* \*

Late at night, after a small feast enjoyed by the four of them in the middle of the night, Harriet returned to her room, washed, dried her hair, and climbed into bed.

Realizing that she couldn't hate Reinhardt more than she liked him, Herriot clung to him in desperation.

I wonder if this is good enough.

While it was true that he couldn't hate Reinhardt, it was also true that he would be the last one standing.

You know you have a deeper heart, a deeper relationship, a deeper connection to other people, and you know you're supposed to be on the periphery.

Should I get in between them and endure their misery forever?

It was fun to just chat with Reinhard, eat something, and talk. I was so happy, relaxed, and happy that I didn't even feel the depression that I was sinking into on my own.

But when he returns to his dorm room, he finds himself back in the shabbiness.

Is this right?

Is it right to have fun now, to be comfortable now, to be happy now, to build a heart now that will hurt more later?

Better to be sick than not.

I'm in a lot of pain right now and might as well be dead.

That way, it won't hurt later.

If you endure this pain now, it will one day become a scar.

After it becomes a scar, at least it won't hurt.

Maybe that's the way to go.

But tomorrow, Reinhardt will be as nonchalant as he's ever been.

It would be funny to ask Reinhardt to stop being so polite and friendly.

Among other things.

We don't know the specifics right now, but Reinhardt had a pretty deep relationship with Charlotte. I believe Reinhardt once saved Charlotte's life when she was in danger.

Ellen and Reinhardt fought for their lives together in the Darklands, and arguably spent the most time together.

In Olivia's case, she was imprisoned and threatened by her adoptive father, and Reinhardt was able to get her out. This is also a life saver.

Reinhardt had a big break with all three but himself.

But yourself?

'Something is too trivial. No matter how much I think about it.......'

Even in your own mind.

It's a shame that I keep getting pushed aside.

In all seriousness, I think I'm objectively a slacker.

"......."

Of course, it's good to have a rough patch, but Herriot wondered if the fact that he didn't have one was making a difference.

Herriot de Saint-Antoine, Grand Duchess of the Duchy of Saint-Antoine, is a feast.

It is no longer possible to say that this body of a Grand Duchess is a commoner. Reinhardt is the champion of Als.

Even how was today?

I almost cowered in front of Reinhardt like I was being stalked, even though nothing had actually happened, and I was so embarrassed I wanted to die of shame.

It's not like we had a big fight and then a big, tearful reconciliation.

This is what happens when you don't have a proper conversation.

It was ridiculous that Herriot was freaking out over something so insignificant that he ended up reconciling with Reinhardt or something.

Isn't even the event of the relationship getting back on track too much of a nagging feeling?

Dawn the next day.

"Grand Duchess Saint-Antoine, I'll need your assistance for a moment."

Until two wizards, who introduced themselves as investigators from the Imperial Ministry of Magic, knocked on his door at the crack of dawn.

Apparently, that's what I was thinking.

When two men show up at her dormitory claiming to be investigators from the Imperial Ministry of Magic, she can't help but panic.

It can't be fake. If it was, it wouldn't have gotten inside the temple in the first place.

"Send me to....... Why?"

"There was a murder in the Imperial Ministry of Magic research library last night, and we need you to be interviewed as a key witness."

"Yes....... What?!"

Homicide.

The words made her head spin, and at the same time, she felt an inexplicable sense of dread.

I couldn't help but stiffen as soon as I heard that it was a crime to do anything wrong, even if it was the retarded Grand Duchess of Saint-Thuan.

It's even a murder in an imperial palace.

Herriot was white as a sheet as he looked at the polite but high-pressure investigators.

It was early in the morning, and their classmates would be sleeping. However, it was also time for the early morning trainers to wake up.

"......, what's going on?"

For example, Reinhardt.

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As soon as I stepped out of my room for my early morning workout, I saw him and briefly debated whether or not to speak to him.

Two outsiders who seem to have come in with serious problems.

When I heard the word "murder," I acted before I thought.

"I need to interview a key informant in a murder case at the Imperial Ministry of Magic. I've already secured Temple's cooperation."

Harriet looks back and forth between me and the investigators.

There's no way Herriot would have done something like murder.

"Do you mind if I stay with you?"

It was clear that Herriot had gotten himself into trouble.

\* \* \*

The Ministry of Magic investigators must have known me.

I offered to act as a chaperone and she agreed to accompany me, even though it was a very important case.

Fortunately, the investigation was not conducted outside the temple, but inside the Royal Class dormitory, in one of the unoccupied on-call rooms.

Herriot had no idea what was happening to him, and neither did I, who had suddenly been thrust into the situation.

Herriot was at the Imperial Ministry of Magic until late last night.

There was a bit of fear yesterday, but he said it was self-delusion.

What was going on after all?

"What....... happening?"

Harriet asked, her lips quivering slightly, and one of the investigators slowly began to explain.

"Last night, three officers were murdered and a spellbook was stolen from the Imperial Ministry of Magic's research library."

Murder, spellbook theft.

At that, Herriot's complexion began to turn from white to blue.

"The most likely suspect at this time is Dwin, the Eighth Research Reading Room officer who is currently out of contact."

"He, he....... Him?"

"Yes, DeWynn, as the person in charge of Reading Room 8, he is believed to be the mastermind of the incident."

as Dwin.

I had never heard of it before.

Herriot was horrified, but then he nodded dazedly, as if he understood.

Slowly, Herriot explained what happened yesterday.

The prime suspect is Lothar Dwin, who has now gone missing since committing the crime.

"I didn't see anything out of the ordinary....... I've been looking at some research material on warp gates....... Oh, come to think of it......."

Herriot hesitated for a moment, then spoke up.

"You said you got the spellbooks from somewhere....... Were they stolen?"

"Yes."

"Strangely, it seemed to be gibberish, and I wondered where it came from....... It was weird, it sounded like he was gibbering......."

"Are you saying that Dwin was a little different than usual?"

"Yeah....... He was always there and not there, but when I needed something, he had it ready for me....... He said something that day, and he wished he'd met me earlier....... Ah."

Herriot mumbled in a daze, as if realizing something.

Herriot told investigators a few more stories, but none of them led to anything significant.

Herriot, however, seemed devastated.

The person you were casually chatting with yesterday has committed murder and fled the palace.

"Thank you for your cooperation in the investigation."

After a brief discussion, the investigators stood up and left, apparently with no further business.

"Is that person....... can you catch him?"

In response to Herriot's fearful questions, investigators would neither confirm nor deny.

"We'll just have to hope for the best."

"Goodbye, then. Thank you for your cooperation. It was a pleasure meeting you, Mr. Reinhardt."

"What? Ah....... Yes."

They thanked Harriet, said it was an honor to meet me, and left the on-call room with some pretty awkward quadruple entendres.

Random murders and thefts.

"......."

Her knuckles were still white from the shock.

Unable to sit still, I brewed some black tea from the on-call room and poured Harriet a cup.

"Oh, yeah....... Thanks. Reinhard."

She sipped her tea carefully, trembling, and when she finally finished, she took a deep breath.

"What the hell is going on......."

Herriot had obviously gone through something strange yesterday.

"That's the guy from yesterday, right?"

"Yes......."

A wizard who had suddenly stolen quite a few spellbooks. Herriot took a deep breath to calm himself.

"I don't know why they stole it, but....... That's a lot of money."

Was it enough to make an elite mage go blind, kill people, and run for his life?

"I thought he was greedy for a spellbook, but he killed a man......."

whoever Dwyn was, he was probably a mage who had been quite helpful to Herriot up to this point. Hearing that he had killed three people she was familiar with, if not close to, was bound to shock her.

Herriot murmurs through narrowed lips.

"I should have been more....... I should have realized that sooner......."

His decision to steal the grimoire had caused him to behave differently than usual. Herriot thought that if he had realized her intentions sooner, none of this would have happened.

"There's no way you could know that."

"Yes, but......."

I wonder if I'm beating myself up.

People might not have died if they had realized quickly that yesterday's Lothar Dwyn wasn't his usual self?

It's impossible to deduce that from his behavior. So Herriot's self-pity is meaningless.

Herriot hangs his head and fiddles with his teacup.

"It's just stupid, if I had realized it was weird, I could have told someone, even if I couldn't do anything about it, because I got scared shitless and ran away......."

Finally, he let out a deep sigh.

"Get yourself a....... pathetic."

I don't think it's Herriot's fault, and I don't think she thinks it's her fault.

However, I regretted my behavior yesterday when I ran away.

The choice to run away without bothering to find out how weird he is.

What to do.

This isn't Herriot's fault, but it's hard to sit back and watch this happen.

It's also a very big deal because it's a murder inside the palace.

"......Want to figure it out on our own?"

"Are we......?"

"I can't expect anything great, but I can't expect to find out nothing, either, right?"

It can't hurt to try.

I have the power to interfere in almost every aspect of the empire in the name of the warrior, and Herriot has the brains.

Most of all, I wanted to do something for Herriot, who hadn't been able to do anything for me.

Of course, I'm not sure that tracking murders is really doing anything.

And this.

Somehow, with this flow.......

[Event Occurrence - Homicide Tracking].

[Explanation: There have been murders and thefts inside the imperial palace; follow the case].

[Reward: 5,000 achievement points, ???]

event was going to be fired, and it was.

\* \* \*

Saturday, morning.

Ellen would normally train on the weekends, but Reinhardt left the dorm with Harriet to run errands.

I don't know what happened yesterday, but I learned that Herriot and Reinhard are back to their old ways.

I was worried that Herriot and Reinhardt seemed to be drifting apart.

Herriot and Reinhardt talking and heading off somewhere, though not in the same way.

I wonder if Herriot is okay now.

Ellen watched them out the window as they left the Temple with mixed feelings, glad for the relief, but somehow unable to fully embrace it.

A good, but not great, feeling.

Feeling this way made Ellen feel guilty for Harriet, but she couldn't help it.

So I found myself getting a little more, well, intimate with Herriot when there were three of us. Even though it felt like it was getting harder and harder for her to handle.

Training is not possible without Reinhardt. Saviolin Tana leaves the temple on weekends to attend to Shanafel's work, so we can't rely on her help.

I wish it wasn't such a time-consuming chore.

As Ellen thought about it, she wondered how she would train on her own.

"Hey."

However, Charlotte came to visit you in your Class A dorm.

"I need to talk to you for a minute."

It's not a friendly relationship to say the least, but it's cider bound by an oath of loyalty.

"Yes."

That's why Ellen obediently followed Charlotte.

\* \* \*

Charlotte led Ellen out of the dormitory.

Charlotte's expression hardened as she realized that he wasn't going to make it easy for her.

"I don't know you very well, but I think your mouth is a little heavy. What do you think?"

"I'm not sure."

"Okay, so you don't think about it at all."

Ellen has a heavy mouth, to the point where the words heavy and light are not even in her head. She's not only insensitive to rumors, she doesn't even have a concept of what's going on.

Charlotte takes a few deep breaths.

A secret few people knew, and Charlotte was about to tell her unchivalrous knight.

"You do know that I was kidnapped and released from the Demon Castle, right?"

"Yes."

With the threat of the demon growing and its presence threatening Reinhardt, Charlotte has finally made up her mind.

"Then, I have a child who escaped with me."

"Like ......?"

"Yes."

Charlotte nodded.

"And I think he's probably the devil now."

"!"

The secret of secrets that only a few know.

Charlotte was going to share it with Ellen.

Very few people know about Charlotte's escape from the demon castle. Of the Temple students, only Charlotte, Bertus, and Reinhardt know the story.

So it's no wonder that Ellen was shocked to hear Charlotte's confession.

From start to finish, Charlotte described her escape from the demon castle.

How Bertus' vassals tried to kill him, and how the kid who brought the teleportation scroll with Darius rescued Charlotte.

Naturally, Ellen is shocked to learn that Charlotte has suffered hardships in the demon castle, but she has no idea that she has a child who escaped with her, and that child is the demon that is now shaking the continent.

"Of course I didn't realize it at the time, he was probably using camouflage magic, but that's not the point, it's almost certain that he's a demon now."

Charlotte bit her lip.

Like you've said everything you're going to say, and you're wondering if you really need to say this.

After thinking about it, Charlotte looked around.

The park in front of the Royal Class dormitory, on a weekend and early in the morning, with no one coming or going.

"I'll tell you, because it's something you need to know if you're going to keep living as my knight anyway."

"Yes."

"You know I'm a psychic, right?"

Ellen nods at Charlotte's words. But as far as Reinhardt knows, Charlotte is in serious trouble. She's suffering from some sort of aftereffect of her return from the Demon Castle, that's all he knows.

Charlotte's superpower.

Ellen doesn't know what it is.

Charlotte held still and extended her right hand.

-ssh

Ellen was almost sick to her stomach when she saw the inky darkness that was beginning to emanate from Charlotte's right hand.

I don't know what it is, but it's an ominous force to behold.

"I have the soul of a demon in my body."

"......what?"

What came next could only make Ellen even more appalled.

"The Devil did something to me when I was trapped in the Devil Castle, and I didn't know what it meant then, but I do now. He planted a piece of his soul in my body so that I could be resurrected, just in case."

Even Ellen, who was blasé about most things, could hardly contain her horror at the words coming out of Charlotte's mouth.

He escaped from the Demon City with the Demon Heir, and even has a portion of the Demon's soul dormant in his body.

The words were pouring out of Ellen's mouth that had long since surpassed the scope of her thinking, which envisioned something like an incurable disease.

"That the current Demon King, the child who escaped back then, saved me not to save me, but to save the Demon King's soul in my body."

"I didn't know it, I had some sense that he might be a demon, but I was deliberately ignoring it, even turning away from it, knowing how to find him."

"Admit it, I was stupid and weak, and I tried to believe he had my best interests at heart, but I don't anymore, and Reinhardt has saved me from this many times, and now the devil might be after him."

When Charlotte finished, she took a deep breath.

"I don't know if the devil is really behind this, but there's also a demonic cult involved, so I'm going to try and pick up the pieces that I've been deliberately turning a blind eye to, and I'm going to tell you all the secrets because it's not about you, and you're my knight."

Just as Ellen chooses to protect Charlotte regardless of her personal feelings, Charlotte recognizes Ellen as her knight regardless of her personal feelings.

"I don't want to burden Reinhard anymore, he'll try to do everything himself, and after all the times he's helped me, I don't want that anymore, so if you don't mind, I'd like to join you in tracking down the demon. I can't use anyone else, it's a matter of my most sensitive secrets, and I have to do it myself. Of course, there's no guarantee that we'll find out where it is, but something is better than nothing, and I'm going to try to do something about it."

Charlotte stares at Ellen.

"Would you like to join me?"

Investigating the Devil's Clue.

Charlotte attempts to reconnect the links that she has broken, with regret.

As the demon's presence begins to threaten the entire continent, Charlotte realizes that she must do something about it.

If it was his own foolishness that had led to this division, he resolved that he must do something to fulfill his minimum duty as royalty.

It's a clue you've already missed, but it might lead you to something.

"Yeah. Let's do it."

Ellen nods in agreement with Charlotte's suggestion.

If you can reach the demon, you can protect Reinhardt.

There was no reason for Ellen to deny it.

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Ellen and Charlotte left the temple.

Charlotte had an artifact that cast a cognitive disruption spell, and Ellen was wearing a robe.

I was prepared for the unwanted attention.

As Charlotte walked down the street, she briefly explained to Ellen where she was going.

How he and Reinhardt found a clue while wandering the streets of the Aligarh district, how he delivered a letter to the shopkeeper with Reinhardt acting as his messenger, and how they stopped corresponding after the last letter, when he became convinced he had lost his mind.

And finally, the whole leave the ecliptic thing.

As she spoke, Charlotte realized how much of a problem she had been creating.

If only you had pursued that wizard, if only you had caught that child, if only you hadn't bet on false hope.

If you had killed the demon.

Everything that's happening now would have never happened.

Charlotte realizes in a new way that she is a sinner, not only of the empire, but of all mankind and of the times.

I was letting my approval, my faith, and my tenuous attachment to it grow a cancer that would eat away at my empire.

If it weren't for Reinhardt, he might have awakened as a demon long ago and started another bloodbath.

In a fit of self-pity, Charlotte pours out her heart to Nazik.

"...... You don't understand me, do you?"

"I don't understand your behavior, but I don't know what you've been through."

"......."

Ellen doesn't say that Charlotte's behavior is right or wrong.

Ellen doesn't know how sick Charlotte was, or how awful she felt in the demon castle.

But after a harrowing life of captivity and near death, the boy who saved him.

I wouldn't have suspected it at the time.

Ellen didn't think it was possible to doubt the man who had risked his life to save her in that situation.

Of course, Charlotte's actions also resulted in a missed opportunity to capture the demon.

The boy who saved his life.

If you've tried to believe it all the way to the end, only to discover the truth: you've been taken advantage of.

Ellen could tell that Charlotte must be devastated.

Ellen doesn't know how to be comforting.

However, the truth is that Charlotte's choices are having a very negative impact on the continent and the empire.

"There's no point in beating yourself up."

Up, not up.

That was all Ellen could say.

"......Yes."

For now, we can only hope that we have the tiniest of clues.

\* \* \*

Life goes on, even if the presence of a demon is causing a stir in the world.

The relentless hawking of Aligarh's shopping district was just another in a series of routines that had nothing to do with the Devil.

No, it was the appearance of a demon that was driving the demand for self-defense.

Ellen felt a renewed sense of excitement as she watched the adventurers hit the road.

Though she wasn't serious about being an adventurer, Ellen had seen them in the Darklands with Reinhardt.

Adventurers continued to appear even as the demon threatened the continent.

Charlotte said to Ellen as she walked past the sight.

"They say a labyrinth has been found in the Darklands that may be Richie's tomb."

"Rich?"

"Yes."

Ellen shook her head at the out-of-the-blue richness.

"The labyrinth hasn't been completely breached, but there are adventurers who wandered in there and brought back a few grimoires. I don't know, but they're pretty good. That's why there's quite a commotion."

"Really?"

"If that's all that's been found, and it's not even broken, I wonder what's really inside."

If a spellbook the size of Labyrinth Byproduct can cause an uproar, it's only natural to assume that there are worse spells or artifacts out there.

Charlotte, who had been walking still, suddenly clicked her tongue.

"Tsk, I hope the devil wasn't involved in what happened yesterday."

"What do you mean, yesterday?"

"...... There was a murder inside the palace, which I was also informed of this morning."

Ellen narrowed her eyes at the word murder.

"In the imperial palace......?"

"Yeah, a member of the Ministry of Magic killed the officers, took the grimoire, and got away with it. I don't know if he's just trying to sell it, but....... You don't think it's the devil's stash, do you?"

Charlotte was with Ellen to follow the demon's trail, but the imperial court was in turmoil.

"I wonder if Harriet was investigated too......."

Suddenly, Ellen understood what Herriot and Reinhardt had meant by their serious talk today.

Herriot has been questioned about what happened last night, and that's probably why they're trying to do something.

Where are Reinhardt and Herriot now, and what are they doing?

I hope you're not trying to get into anything dangerous.

Ellen thinks so.

"Were the stolen spellbooks....... were they important?"

"That's my biggest problem right now."

Charlotte says with a narrowed brow.

"You don't know the contents of the stolen grimoire."

"......what?"

For a moment, Ellen had no idea what Charlotte was talking about.

"What do you mean, it was stolen and you don't know what was stolen?"

"They'd been at the palace for less than a day and were gone before we could figure it out."

So they didn't even realize how dangerous the spellbook was.

"Yeah, I should know that."

Charlotte was going to tell Ellen everything about herself. She needed to know all of her secrets so that she could fulfill her role as a knight.

"Those grimoires, I took them from the basement of Demon Castle yesterday."

\* \* \*

Herriot and I left the temple and headed for the palace. I don't know what we can do, but you have to be there to know what happened.

I was wearing a hood in case my face was recognizable, and Harriet was wearing a hood just like me, though I'm not sure why she copied me.

as Dwin.

Why did he steal the spellbook and get away with it?

"Of course it's going to be expensive, right?"

"It's just expensive."

She nodded at my words.

"It is also very difficult for an individual to qualify to own a grimoire. Most wizards can only access or borrow grimoires that are officially published by a large organization, school, association, or guild, and unless you're qualified, you can't access grimoires above a certain rank or level of danger."

Just as enchantments are strictly controlled, grimoires are a strictly controlled system.

"There are a lot of loose spellbooks out there because they're hard to regulate, but spellbooks are basically not something you can buy, even if you have money."

"So it's not something you can easily sell?"

At my words, Harriet glared at me.

"No way."

"...... is hard to buy, but easy to sell?"

"There's no shortage of wizards who want to keep a rare grimoire to themselves. If it's a rare spell, they'll pay a fortune for it, but if it's a very rare spell that's not yet known to the world, it's more likely to contain a new theory or method of manipulating magic than it is to be useful."

It's supposed to be a rare spellbook, but it's a very expensive item. You can't officially have dangerous magic, but you can have it secretly.

Whatever, spellbooks are worth money. Especially if they're rare.

"I don't think it was about the money, ever."

"You said spellbooks make money."

Harriet looks at me, her lips subtly pursed.

What is this scorned feeling?

"If you're a wizard good enough to work in the labs of the Imperial Ministry of Magic, you can make a fortune making copies and selling them. There's no need to steal them."

"......Uh, yeah."

Now that I think about it, it makes sense.

"So I don't think Lothar Dwyn stole the grimoire for the money."

As it turns out, Herriot was right.

If it's about money, why would he steal a grimoire and have a group of murderous thugs inside the empire when there are so many other ways to make it safely?

"That's odd. The pay would be substantial, and the Empire wouldn't use just anybody. I'm sure his identity is clear and he's been vetted......."

I'm sure they're skilled, but they could be trusted, or they could be part of the Imperial Ministry of Magic's research library. He's been killing people and stealing grimoires for reasons we don't know.

If not money, what reason.

Was the magic an end in itself?

Cantus Magna.

I couldn't help but think of that group in my head.

Was he a member of the Cantus Magna?

"Stolen spellbooks, do you know what they are?"

"I don't know, and Lothar Dwyn didn't seem to know, but apparently Richie's grave was found in Fort Darklands the other day. I wonder if that's where they took it from....... Yeah, he seemed curious about where the grimoire came from."

Ritchie's Tomb.

This is a trap designed to lure out Cantus Magna.

From there, the leaked grimoire reached the Imperial Palace, and Lothar Dwyn stole it?

According to Herriot, Lothar Dwin was curious about the source of the grimoire.

That said.

If it's Cantus Magna, it means that information about the Labyrinth of Darklands will reach them.

This means that Cantus Magna may be approaching the Labyrinth.

I thought Harriet was in the middle of something weird, but was it actually something I needed to do?

I'm not sure yet. But if the Rosser-Dwin case has even the slightest connection to the Cantus Magna, I'm going to have to look into it against Herriot's will.

\* \* \*

I'm not yet at the point where my face is a business card. Nor do I want it to be. What I'm going through at the Temple is enough to drive me crazy, but I can't imagine not being recognized anywhere on the continent.

Of course, a coat of arms was a substitute for access to the palace, and Herriot had been shamelessly dropping in and out of the palace.

However, many were barred from entering the palace.

-The Imperial Palace is currently on lockdown.

It's no wonder the entire palace is on edge, as there's been an uprising inside the palace. All but a few nobles and officials who had business in the palace were barred from entering.

The atmosphere inside the palace was just as murderous.

The Ministry of Magic was located in the southern part of the palace, but apparently the entire palace was on high alert, with soldiers and knights scurrying about.

"I'm sure....... because it wasn't normal......."

Her voice quivered slightly with exhaustion as she arrived on the scene.

A simple murder would be one thing, but a murder inside the palace is another. Herriot is not a witness, but she spoke with the killer just yesterday.

As if she's finally realizing what the hell she's getting herself into, Harriet gently grabs the end of my sleeve. As if without realizing it.

"Don't bother, it's not going to happen, let's go to the field."

"ugh, ugh......."

Herriot and I took the tram that runs inside the palace to the location of the Ministry of Magic.

From the central palace tetra, the north was the Spring Palace, home to Charlotte, the east was the Summer Palace, home to members of the imperial family, the south was the ministries responsible for the main business of the empire, and the west was the Winter Palace, home to Bertus.

Our destination was south, but not far.

The southern section of the Imperial Palace, which housed the ministries responsible for the main business of the empire, was lined with massive buildings, and the grandiose Ministry of Magic was one of them.

The massive marble architecture was both massive and elegant.

But now the area was surrounded by a large number of soldiers, and the entrance was blocked by a guard.

In the Imperial Palace, where the atmosphere was already serious, the Ministry of Magic was at its most alert.

"......Is this something I should be doing?"

Herriot said that with a hint of trepidation, as if he thought it was something he shouldn't approach lightly.

"I'm not asking you to do anything, I'm just asking you to explore, so what's the harm?"

At my words, Harriet looked at me blankly and sighed heavily with a dumbfounded expression.

"I hate to say this, but....... Why are you such a hardass?"

When Herriot said that even I, the Grand Duchess, could see such a large number of troops, and you could not see them at all, I had nothing to say.

Really?

Come to think of it, I'm not even used to this stuff.

So you've gone from being a bully to being a hero, and now you're being treated like one?

I've come a long way from when I first fell into this world unknowingly.

"I was born this way."

"You're amazing to watch......."

Herriot followed me cautiously.

Naturally, the Ministry of Magic was the center of the action, so it was bound to get in the way first.

"This area is currently off-limits."

"I'm aware of that, but I don't know if I can......."

"Reinhard? Saint-Thuan......?"

Just as I was about to explain, I heard a voice calling out to me from behind.

The voice is pretty familiar by now.

"What's going on here?"

Bertus had just arrived at the Ministry of Magic with a group of men.

Episode 414.

Bertus met me at the entrance, a member of the imperial family who had come to investigate an incident inside the palace.

Luckily, without much explanation, Herriot and I were able to get into the locked Ministry building with Bertus.

"You want to investigate?"

"Uh, I'll see what I can do."

At my words, Bertus shook his head, not sure why I would want to get involved in this case.

But then he turned to Harriet, who was standing next to me, and nodded.

"I heard that Saint-Étienne is doing research at the Ministry of Magic. Do you know if......."

"Yeah....... The killer was the reading room attendant I was in."

"...... is it?"

Bertus nodded, as if he hadn't noticed. Bertus narrowed his eyes and sighed.

"That must have been a shock, did you know him or......?"

"No, I wouldn't say we're close....... It's just that we talked about something yesterday....... There was something weird going on yesterday. I spoke to the people at the Imperial Ministry of Magic earlier......."

"Okay, you'll have to listen to that one."

Bertus crosses his arms and glances around the Ministry of Magic.

"It can't hurt to have an extra head to think about, so let's go, shall we?"

Bertus didn't seem to think we could figure anything out, but he allowed us to investigate.

\* \* \*

It seemed that Bertus only came to the Ministry after the events of the night, when it was clear that the Ministry and its environs were safe.

Yesterday, Charlotte was still in her dorm room, and does she know that this happened?

With the entourage Bertus had brought with him, we headed to the Ministry of Magic research library where the incident had taken place.

"I don't mind, but Reinhardt doesn't mind. Are you okay?"

"Me? What......?"

"I need to see the body."

I'm asking you if you can handle the fact that the site will be preserved and you might have to look a little rough around the edges from now on.

"Oh, ugh....... Uh-huh. It's okay."

Herriot looked a little fed up, but nodded as if he could handle it.

Harriet should have a low tolerance for such things, but come to think of it, she'd seen chimeras in Aaron Mede's mansion the last time she'd been there. Even the remains of the countless chimeras Ellen had sliced and diced.

You may not have a tolerance for it, but that doesn't mean you haven't witnessed horror stories.

"Okay, let's go then."

We walked toward the Ministry of Magic research library.

The attendant briefed the incident so that we could hear it as well as Bertus.

"The estimated time of the incident is around 2am last night. The suspect, presumably Lothar Dwyn, attacked the on-call workers, Arjelka, Sadman von Grinthes, and Linnia Wenson, as they were sorting through newly received grimoires. He is believed to have killed all three and then fled with the grimoires."

The research library was underground, even in the Ministry of Magic, and quite deep. The locks were unlocked for now, but it was clear that it was not a place to be entered lightly.

"Current estimates suggest that Rosser-Dwynn holed up in the research library while off duty and targeted the early morning hours when only the on-call staff would be around."

Taking advantage of a time when the research library was minimally staffed, he killed the mages on duty, stole the grimoires, and fled.

"I don't know how the hell they got past this guard."

"......For now."

The attendant nodded at Bertus' words.

While still heavily guarded, the Ministry of Magic's research library was surely well prepared for theft and other problems.

There would have been checkpoints like at the temple gate, and there would have been guards.

When I and Herriot didn't understand, Bertus explained further.

"As for Dwyn, he's the only suspect because he's never clocked out, and there's no record of anyone seeing him leave the Ministry of Magic building, and certainly no record of him leaving the palace."

"......what?"

"So Lothar Dwyn could still be in the palace somewhere, or even hiding somewhere in the Ministry of Magic building."

The words made both me and Harriet swallow hard.

"There's no way he could have used some flimsy camouflage spell or invisibility, we've got all that covered. The problem is, we don't know if Lothar Dwyn is still in the palace, and if so, how he got out."

This incident could have been more dangerous than me and Harriet realized.

"Haha, what are you afraid of?"

Bertus chuckled as me and Harriet looked a little fed up.

"I wouldn't have come myself if the Ministry wasn't safe, would I?"

So we don't have to worry about what's going on inside the Ministry building, Bertus tried to reassure me and Harriet.

"As long as there's a guy who can kill three people in the Ministry of Magic research library and get away with it without getting caught, life is always going to be dangerous."

"You know, if you want to reassure, reassure, and if you want to scare, scare."

"It's just that we don't know anything for sure yet."

"What the hell were you doing?"

"It just is."

I was just having a normal conversation, like in a temple.

I felt the attendants around me looking at me like I was a monster.

Oh, right.

This was the prince, right?

The casualness with which I spoke and the nonchalance with which Bertus accepted it seemed to them like something that couldn't possibly happen in real life.

Right.

Isn't this a friendship between the top 1% and the bottom 1% or something, even if I am the champion of Als?

The deeper you go, the worse it gets.

Anyway, to the horrified admiration of the entourage, we soon arrived at the scene of the crime.

"Suck!"

Herriot's mouth dropped open as soon as he saw the scene.

"I heard about....... I never thought it would be this......."

Frowning, Bertus let out a short sigh.

I knew there would be bodies.

"What is....... this?"

But I didn't expect to find him dead, with his eyeballs gouged out, his fingers and toes hacked off, and his intestines spilling out.

"As we have already reported, all three victims....... were tortured for long periods of time and then killed......."

A quick comment from the attendant explained what was happening on the ground.

\* \* \*

I don't know if you can call it a clue or not, but something along those lines has been added.

As Dwin, he didn't just kill the officers, he tortured all three before killing them.

Why torture?

Herriot covered his mouth as he looked away from the scene, unable to stare at this horrific, devastating scene any longer.

Even I, who had developed a certain tolerance for seeing gruesome things, was nauseated.

"The officers in charge of analyzing the grimoire were all high-ranking mages in the Mage Corps with the combat capabilities of a top-tier Battle Mage, and they were no strangers to combat, having fought in the Demon War."

"They were killed by a bunch of clerks."

"......Yes."

Wizards are a different animal.

As members of the Imperial Mage Corps and veterans of the Demon War, they were at the top of their profession in the world of mages.

And the suspect, Lothar Dwyn, may have been skilled, but he worked in a position that had nothing to do with combat.

"You've been hiding your skills."

This leads us to conclude that it's not that they're incompetent, but that Lothar Dwyn is no ordinary wizard in the first place.

A spy planted by Cantus Magna in the imperial court.

I can't help but lean more and more toward that.

"We suspect that Dwyn was quite dabbling in the dark arts. We found a significant amount of black magic in his body as well as in the atmosphere, though it has since been cleansed."

"Black magic?"

"Yes, the Regenerate family of black magic has a similar effect to healing, and I'm guessing that's what you used."

At the mention of healing, Bertus shook his head.

"Healing....... Oh, no."

Bertus looks at the dead bodies.

"It looks like you drove him to the brink of death, then forced him to regenerate and torture him again."

"Nonsense......."

Bertus's words made Herriot's lips turn blue and she shuddered.

"Black magic's regeneration spells are meant to make the fish electron feel a great deal of pain in exchange for a powerful regenerative effect. You can think of it as a way of equivalently substituting pain for healing."

"Magic for torture rather than healing."

"Yes, I know, it's actually a spell created for that purpose."

I thought only priests practiced torture like that, but apparently warlocks use the healing process itself to inflict even more pain.

It was chilling to hear. Herriot shuddered at the idea of the dead being tortured, then forcibly reanimated, then tortured again.

I could see the emotion in Herriot's eyes.

Anger.

Beyond her grief and horror, Harriet was furious at Dwyn for doing this to her.

"If the grimoire was the goal, they would have just killed them. What the hell were they trying to find out by torturing them......."

"I....... I know......."

Herriot answered Bertus's question.

Dwin's last conversation with Herriot before committing the crime was apparently with Dwin. He's gone, and she's baffled, though she does give an explanation to investigators.

"The source of the stolen spellbooks. I'm sure he was trying to figure that out......."

But when she saw the torture scene, she thought she had a clearer idea of what Lothar Dwyn really wanted.

\* \* \*

Ellen and Charlotte walked through the Aligarh shopping district and soon arrived at their destination.

"This is it, if I remember correctly."

A ramshackle shop that could have reached the boy who saved him.

"Looks like no one's here."

"I suppose."

It had already been closed for quite some time. As the Demon King rose to prominence, so did the owner of the scroll shop.

-rattle, rattle

Ellen approached the door and tugged on the doorknob, but sure enough, the door was locked.

Charlotte mumbles to herself.

"I'm sure there's not much to see inside......."

"I suppose."

Once, Charlotte had forced the door open. But now it would be difficult to find any trace of the dead, vaporized man.

Charlotte knew she wasn't going to get much out of the only clue she could find. But it was one thing to think so, and quite another to realize it.

Too late.

If only I had gone to the Demon Castle sooner. If only I had known the truth sooner.

If only I'd been a little more venomous and grabbed the store owner and questioned him.

If that were the case, the world wouldn't need heroes, and Ellen and Reinhardt wouldn't be in such danger.

Funny, though.

The presence of the demon is still keeping Charlotte alive.

The presence of the Devil has made people feel the need for a hero, and that's why Reinhardt and Ellen feel secure in their support of Charlotte.

Had the times not been so suspicious and bleak, the world would have been less favorable to the owners of the relics. The position of the heroes would not be as great, and Charlotte would not be able to rely on their protection to ensure her survival.

In the end, the Devil is still somehow the driving force behind Charlotte's life.

Ellen shook her head at the shop door, which was firmly closed.

"But why don't we break it in, just in case?"

Without even asking the landlord's opinion, Ellen said nonchalantly. Of course, they could just pay for the repairs later.

"Yeah, I've come this far, no reason not to check......."

"Ladies, that place went out of business a long time ago."

Behind them, someone spoke.

Charlotte turned her head, and there was a bushy-bearded middle-aged man in an apron.

There's nothing to be found in an empty store. But it's not over yet, and there's no reason to give up.

'Yeah....... That's right.'

"Did you know the owner of this store?"

"Hmm? I've seen it here and there."

We were left with one last resort: probing.

"By any chance, can I talk to you for a minute?"

Trying to grasp at straws.

And then Charlotte found the straw.

Episode 415.

A middle-aged man who runs a weapons shop introduced himself as Raldren.

Aligarh's merchants don't spend their time on things that don't pay, but Raldren brought Ellen and Charlotte to his weapons shop for a chat without even asking for money.

"Elena wasn't much of a social butterfly, but she was a sweetheart, always wishing me a good morning, a good lunch, a good dinner. She'd wish you a happy day."

The store owner's name, Elena.

While Charlotte knew this information, it was new to Ellen.

"There were quite a few of them that bothered her, not to mention the younger ones, and there were some that were killing old men for not selling their wares. You should know the subject. This is not to be discussed in public, but there was a fellow over here named Swinton that bothered her to no end. He's got a wife."

"Oh....... Well, is it......."

"You're a bad person."

Charlotte broke out in a cold sweat at the unnecessary overload of information, and Ellen muttered something short. It was a short but murderous sentiment.

Charlotte knew that Elena didn't have a very close relationship with people.

Elena was friendly to everyone, but she never developed more than a passing acquaintance with anyone.

"He wasn't meant to be in business. He was too soft-hearted." ....... You know how Aligarh can be a little rough with his customers? He doesn't know how to do that, and he seems to undercut them. I wonder if that's how he makes his living......."

Charlotte already knew most of that, so this information was only new to Ellen.

She's been in business for so long that she can't make a profit from it, so what's the point of being a merchant? I used to think she was an agent of the Emperor with ulterior motives, but now I think differently.

The conclusion is that the demon has come to ask for help from a Darkland spy infiltrating the ecliptic, and Elena has hidden her lord in a safe place.

It wasn't a chance encounter, it was planned.

Charlotte had always known that Elena was a Darkland spy.

"But he did seem to have quite the pulpit."

"The pulpit?"

"I mean, there were all these guys flirting with me, and I never got hit on, and they all went home looking like they'd been punished, and Mr. Swinton got his ass kicked pretty hard, too, and he didn't go anywhere afterward."

There were many men who hit on Elena, but they all walked away as if they had been punished.

"She said she had a boyfriend.

Charlotte once found a lock of blonde hair on Elena's bed when she was searching her shop. When asked whose hair it was, she said it was her boyfriend's because it was so different from Elena's hair color.

But in hindsight, Elena didn't have a deep relationship with anyone.

So the boyfriend thing is a lie. An agent on an important mission to infiltrate the ecliptic is not likely to be romantically involved.

Therefore, the blonde hair must have belonged to someone other than her boyfriend.

Not the Devil. Charlotte's hair was more of a reddish-brown color than blonde.

But if it's a disguise, it's not too far-fetched to think that the hair on the bed belongs to the devil.

I thought I was going to be living in a remote area off the ecliptic, but was I really living on the second floor of a ramshackle store on the ecliptic?

Blonde is not a very common hair color, so it was difficult to identify it based on that alone.

"It was a bit of a bummer, by the way. I didn't think he'd just disappear without saying goodbye............. The landlord was happy that the tenant left all his stuff in place, because he didn't want it to go to waste."

"Oh, I see......."

With the Demon rising to prominence, it was only natural that Elena would leave. After all, Charlotte and Reinhardt had a clear picture of the alleged demon's whereabouts.

Raldren glanced around, then looked at Charlotte.

"I'm the only one who knows this."

"Ah. What do you have?"

"You know, Elena, it's actually....... I don't think she likes younger guys."

"......Yes?"

It sounded so out of place that Charlotte blanched and Ellen shook her head.

"No....... There was this one guy who would come by from time to time. He looks like a parasitic oraby, and he sings as much as his hair. That's how I feel about him. He looks like he's gonna make the girls cry."

"......."

"......."

Naturally, Ellen and Charlotte's eyes met.

I thought I knew who he was talking about.

I couldn't help but realize that he was talking about Reinhardt.

Reinhardt had been in and out of the shop as Charlotte's messenger in the first place, so it's not surprising that Raldren, the shopkeeper next door, would remember him.

"All the guys who come in for the purpose of collecting usually go home with their asses kicked, and he didn't look like he was doing that, but brazenly coming in? I'm telling you, cancer."

Elena, who was nice to everyone but never gave her heart to anyone, must have had secret tastes, Raldren seemed to conclude.

Charlotte knows it's a big mistake, and Ellen knows the middle-aged furball is saying something strange because she's heard it from Charlotte.

Reinhard hadn't been to Eleris's shop since Charlotte told him he could stop delivering her letters. The next time would be when Charlotte offered to tell the wizard to run away when she was torn between Reinhard and the devil.

The devil can't be that much of a threat, Reinhardt had said, so just run away.

He said he'd take care of it later.

So that's where Charlotte's guilt comes from.

I should have told him to stop being indecisive and grab Elena.

In the end, no new information was gained, and Charlotte had to see that every decision she made had negative consequences for everyone.

Charlotte is about to leave when she realizes that there's nothing new to learn, and that probing would be pointless if it was all already known.

"But I wonder if it's because of him that Elena closed her business and went off somewhere."

"Is that ......?"

Another sound from Raldren's mouth made Charlotte pause.

Of course, Elena probably heeded Reinhardt's warning and left the ecliptic.

But how can he think that if he hasn't heard your secret story?

"What kind of girl did he bring home last time?"

Woman.

At that, both Charlotte and Ellen fell silent.

"I think she's the girl I go to temple with, judging by the way she's dressed. Apparently I have a new girlfriend now, so that's that. I wonder if I said something like this, and that's why Elena left because she was hurt."

What kind of bizarre delusions and speculation is this?

Both Ellen and Charlotte were puzzled, but they did get a strange piece of information.

Reinhardt came to Elena's shop with a woman in a Temple uniform.

We don't know who they brought or what they talked about.

"Both men and women had a look on their faces that said they were determined to do something. I guess that's why Elena went out of business not long after that. Anyway, that yellow-haired guy. He's been hitting on me since the first time I saw him."

I don't know much about Reinhardt, but Raldren's comment that he's probably a dirty bastard because he has a dirty first impression is kind of true.

Of course, I'm pretty sure that guess is almost always wrong, but at the end of the day, facts are facts.

For Reinhardt, Elena's store would never have been the place to bring someone, but he did.

Normally, Reinhardt would have kept a low profile after Elise saved his subterranean room.

But Reinhardt's visit to Eleris's shop with Radia Schmidt was an emergency, and he wasn't in a position to take such precautions.

That left a trail.

"Do you remember the description of the woman who came with you, and when was that?"

At Charlotte's question, Raldren shakes his head.

"First of all, she had dark hair, I think, and she had weird eyes, I should say creepy. Like, not quite normal....... I guess that's why it's so memorable......."

He narrowed his eyes, as if remembering something.

"Yeah. I remember the next day, there was a big fuss about the demon. Paladins were slaughtered. It was a big deal, I remember."

"......."

"......."

On the day of the demon attack, Reinhardt came to Elena's shop with a girl from the Temple.

And the store's owner is closely associated with the supposed devil.

Who is the woman Reinhard brought with him. Why Reinhard was looking for Elena.

Ellen and Charlotte's eyes met.

"......."

"......."

They didn't say anything.

No, I couldn't say anything.

\* \* \*

At the end of her investigation, Charlotte made her case to Raldren.

Why do you ask?" was the answer to Raldren's question. Raldren took the gold coin, nodded as if he understood what it meant, and asked no more questions.

"......."

"......."

Charlotte and Ellen's minds are filled with strange visions.

Overthinking is also a problem.

And both Ellen and Charlotte have enough flashes of brilliance to play out the situation in their heads.

Chronologically, the first time Charlotte tells Reinhard that she'll forget about the demon is after Leviathan is killed.

But Reinhardt went to visit Elena on the day of the attack.

There was no reason for Reinhardt to visit Elena now that the letter had been delivered.

It is certainly possible that Reinhard could have visited Elena in private. It's not impossible that Reinhard could have had a private conversation with Elena and become intimate with her, rather than just acting as a messenger for the letter.

But isn't it a bit odd for Reinhardt to meet with Elena in private, knowing that she and the person she's protecting are highly suspicious?

Oddly enough, he even took a woman with him to the temple.

And on that very day, they raided Levereer Ranch.

Elena is a mage.

And Charlotte knows that the Devil's forces include powerful wizards.

Unless there is another wizard, it is very likely that Elena is the wizard.

Reinhardt brought a Temple girl to Elena's shop, and Elena participated in the raid on the Leverier Ranché that night.

And.

The day of the raid on Levereer Ranch.

It was the day of the Miss Temple contest. Reinhardt did not attend the Miss Temple pageant.

It was a painful memory that Ellen held close to her heart, and Charlotte knew that.

Ellen rummages through her memory.

Reinhardt returned to the temple very late, his cheeks and hands frozen, unable to move.

Recall the Reinhardt of the day.

"Ellen."

Charlotte calls out to Ellen.

"Yes."

They both run through the numbers in their heads.

"We shouldn't say anything until we know for sure."

"......."

"Until we know for sure, let's not think about it."

We don't know where we'll end up after all that reasoning, but we do know what we see beyond the veil of darkness.

Somehow.

The truth seemed almost too much to bear, so they stopped thinking about it.

"Sure. Let's do it."

Ellen said that Nazik said.

Episode 416.

Darklands.

"This must be an unusual place."

Archduke Saint-Thuan muttered to himself as he walked across the misty ground.

-Physics!

-Can!

Before the Archduke could do anything, one of the beasts was struck by a blast from the mages around him, disintegrating into ash.

Archduke Saint-Étienne had now entered the Labyrinth Zone with his mages.

It doesn't start the moment you enter the Labyrinth, it starts the moment you enter the area surrounded by thick fog.

The Archduke and the Mages were navigating cautiously, taking one step at a time.

"The mana concentration in the atmosphere is erratic."

"Yeah, I'm feeling that too."

Though he couldn't see through the fog, the Archduke's senses could feel the mana around him fluctuating.

Mana in the atmosphere is supposed to have a constant, if not uniform, concentration. That mana is always changing, which means that there is always something going on around you.

"The environment around us is changing in real time with our movements. Even the demons that attack us are probably not real creatures, but variables created by this labyrinth."

The Archduke is not a clumsy wizard.

So, unlike other adventurers who mindlessly beat their way through the monsters of the Labyrinth, I had a different approach to the Labyrinth.

Don't move around.

This maze isn't something you can move through.

As the Archduke knew, the labyrinth was rumored across the continent.

The labyrinth was already well known in the Darklands as a favorite haunt.

That's why the mothballs were getting tangled up.

Some adventurers wander off for days on end, returning as superheroes, while others never return.

Those who return with a few spellbooks from the labyrinth that sucks in so many adventurers like an ant-hole are worth a fortune.

Nevertheless, the center was never breached, so the archduke came with his own elite.

"Compared to the number of adventurers in this labyrinth, don't you think the number of people you encounter along the way is too small?"

"Yes, Your Majesty."

Before entering the Labyrinth, the Archduke gathered information from those who had actually experienced the Labyrinth at a nearby staging point.

The labyrinth has sucked in a staggering number of adventurers, but most have emerged unharmed.

The labyrinth itself wasn't designed to kill, but to make people wander around and die of exhaustion, and the demons that spawned were more of an artifact that the Archduke didn't even have to go out of his way to see.

So, exhausted, they turned back, rearmed themselves, and entered the labyrinth over and over again. With the hope that one day, they would reach the heart of the labyrinth.

The fact that you could keep failing and keep trying again was what kept adventurers hooked on this labyrinth.

In the unlikely event that they find a grimoire of immense value, their lives are relatively unimportant, and the adventurers are bound to get into trouble.

So the Archduke knows that there are tons of adventurers wandering around this vast region.

So if they could actually see the people in this labyrinth, they would have to face another party of adventurers.

But in all his hours of wandering, the Archduke had only encountered a party of adventurers once so far, and they'd gotten scared shitless at the sight of his group and disappeared into the distance.

"It looks like there's a nesting of dimensions. Maybe there's not just one labyrinth, but dozens or hundreds of layers of labyrinths, and that's why I can't see other people."

The Archduke surmised that the phenomenon must be a labyrinth of overlapping spaces, where everyone enters by a different path.

"It's not the depth of this labyrinth that matters, it's just figuring out what this labyrinth is that will change the world."

This labyrinth was already a body in itself.

It's a labyrinth with hundreds of layers of dimensions in a single space, and its surroundings change in real time. The Archduke sensed the mana around him, made some educated guesses about the nature of this labyrinth, and came to a conclusion.

"This labyrinth changes the path so that we cannot reach its depths in the first place, unless the master of the labyrinth leads us inward."

It's a maze that changes in real time, so you can't get to the exit any one way. As you wander, you lose your sense of direction and end up walking this way or that, just as the maze master intended.

The servants await the Archduke's judgment.

The Saint-Thuan family has a long history.

A family that has gone from tanning leather to being the losers of a region through the use of magic.

The Saintoons are also known for never forgetting their roots.

Power and glory have been theirs, but they have not forgotten their roots as wizards, and they have honed their craft from generation to generation, passing on their mastery to their successors.

Nevertheless, there is a degree of righteousness.

Never intoxicated by the lust for power.

He has always shunned unclean and evil powers, keeping in mind that the extremes of the martial arts are never achieved through the power of the saihan.

The House of Saint-Thuan is renowned not only for its magical prowess, but also for its purity, for never going near an apostle.

The apostle's path is a fast and unorthodox one, but in the end, it is only the apostle's path that leads to mastery.

The Archduke focuses on the flow of mana around him.

The labyrinth is structured in such a way that the moment you enter, you are lost. The moment you take a step, you're entering one of the dozens or hundreds of virtual dimensions that this labyrinth has to offer.

You can't find the way out of this labyrinth no matter how much you wander inside, so there's only one way to get out.

You need to get out of the virtual dimension of the labyrinth of hundreds of layers and head back to the original dimension that actually exists.

"......."

The Archduke finds his way.

A sense of nested dimensions, and a single path through them.

The only way out of this labyrinth is to carve a path back to the original dimension.

It's not about finding the gate to the labyrinth, and it's not about digging through the labyrinth.

This labyrinth was not only complicated in terms of the path itself, but also the math to find the only living gate.

Finding the true path through the dimensions that were changing and being created in real time was like trying to find the eye of the storm in the middle of a typhoon in the middle of a typhoon.

However.

Geniuses who go down in martial arts history are not born for nothing.

Herriot de Saint-Ouen is the daughter of the Grand Duke.

"Here."

As such, it's no wonder that the Grand Duke's Five Stars are no match for a mere wizard.

-curl!

The Archduke waved his hand, and the void gaped, opening a portal.

"All hands on deck."

The Archduke walked toward the exit, his servants trailing behind him.

Stepping through the gate, the Archduke looked around. He felt no pride or satisfaction in having broken through the labyrinth that so many adventurers and mages had wandered through.

The look on his face was unimpressed, as he was just doing what he was supposed to do.

"Not much different."

We broke through the maze, but the surroundings were still foggy and not much different from where we'd been walking.

"The flow of mana is stable."

"Yeah, I guess this is where we need to be, even if it doesn't look any different."

The flow of mana, which had been rampaging and altering the environment, has stabilized. The Labyrinth is essentially a vast portal in the surrounding mountains. The moment you enter, you enter a virtual dimension.

Therefore, the interior of the actual labyrinth was bound to be a tranquil area with no labyrinths in any of the devices. It's just foggy.

Now that you're not lost, all you have to do is find Richie's tomb, which is somewhere around here. If Richie's tomb is sealed, this will take some time, but the Archduke has already found the way.

"Remember. We're not there to take a spell."

The Archduke walks slowly and speaks to his men.

"Unholy beings would not study pure magic. We will destroy most of their grimoires. Those who are blinded by vain desires, turn back, and we will show you the way."

"Your Majesty, but there may be considerable magical value in the grimoire we found."

"I'm sure it will."

The Archduke already knew the value of the discovered grimoires.

"It is possible to build good with evil power. I'm sure."

The Archduke does not know the value of power, and he knows that it depends more on the will of the wielder than on its own nature.

"But in a world where most people don't build good with good power, what does evil power have to say?"

It is too much to expect evil powers to do good in the world when even paladins and priests do evil as they breathe.

Something that evil powers shy away from even its appearance.

It is the minimum good that the Grand Duke considers, and it is also a teaching that has been passed down through the Saint-Thuan family for generations.

The Archduke believed that magic was already too powerful, and that more magic might actually harm the world.

The Archduke is there to destroy Mado's new vision and Richie's new discoveries, not to take them.

How many steps you took.

"There's someone there."

"I see."

The Archduke saw the faint shape of someone beyond the fog.

Master of the Labyrinth.

Or a visitor to the same labyrinth as you.

The Archduke is confident in his abilities, but he's also not cocky.

You've broken through the labyrinth, so it's possible that someone else has broken through the labyrinth, so it's possible that someone else has broken through the labyrinth and is walking ahead of you.

"Don't be afraid. I have no intention of hostility."

Before leaping into action, the Archduke made his intentions known. If he uses his hand, he'll have to face him, but there's no need for bloodshed.

It was clear that whoever I was up against was not normal, as I was in the equivalent of the exit of a labyrinth from which I could never reach the exit.

The figure turns at the sound of a voice from behind.

-.......

It was a woman, her head turned in silence, looking at the Archduke.

A cold-looking woman with long black hair, dressed in a simple outfit and wearing a single cloak.

It was unarmed and pale-skinned.

"I didn't know there were customers."

The woman spoke in a monotone, cold tone. Her calm gaze held neither hostility nor favor. Of course, she was skilled enough to break through the labyrinth, so he couldn't treat her lightly, but he couldn't figure out who she was.

"Are you here to find the dungeon?"

"That would be the case, so to speak."

The woman replied, bowing her head slightly as if in greeting.

"Ordinarily, I would pass you by, but circumstances being circumstances and place being place, I must ask: I am Raphael de Saint-Étienne of the Duchy of Saint-Étienne, and may I ask who you are and where you are from?"

The woman shook her head slightly and stared at the Archduke.

There was no fear of the many mages behind him, no fear or curiosity about the Archduke's presence.

"Luna."

The woman with the moon's name says still.

"I'm Luna of Rizaira."

The archduke did not know the name of the town.

"That's the name of a place I don't recognize, sorry."

"It's a small town in the middle of nowhere, no wonder you don't know it."

The damsel in distress was the first to break through the labyrinth that the Archduke, the most magically savvy of the Archmages, had broken through.

Neither the Archduke nor any of his men believed her story of being a peasant. But the woman stared at him, unwilling to explain further.

A calm stare that conveys neither hostility nor favor.

The Archduke was reluctant to send her ahead of him, or to let her go ahead of him, even though he couldn't tell if she was an enemy or an ally.

She was a young woman, but the Archduke had no idea of her true age. There are many who have mastered the maneuvering of magic who don't look their age, such as Xaviorin Tana, the head of Shanapelle.

The opponent didn't seem to be anything close to a dungeon or labyrinth master.

However, if this person has arrived to secure the scroll, a fight is inevitable.

The Archduke opened his mouth nervously.

"Since we don't know what our mutual understanding is, I'll say up front that I intend to destroy the dungeon and burn the spellbooks. What about you?"

"There's no business in the grimoire, so if that's what the Archduke is doing, I don't see how our interests can conflict."

If you're in a place made famous by a grimoire, and you're not interested in grimoires, then why are you here?" He couldn't quite trust this strange woman, but he didn't seem willing to share his surface animosity.

"We're going the same way, so why don't you come with me?"

"If it pleases His Highness, of course."

The expressionless woman gave a faint smile at the Archduke's offer.

For some reason, the Archduke had the uncanny feeling that this woman would not be his enemy. But it's not in his nature to rely on such intuition.

Paying attention, I was about to move forward when the woman who introduced herself as Lunara flanked me.

"Oops, I didn't realize there were already customers."

From the woods to the side, a young man emerged through the fog.

One more woman.

The Archduke narrowed his eyes at the sight of more who had made it through the labyrinth.

Rather than panic at the sight of the newcomer, the woman simply stared at him, her demeanor no different than when she'd met the Archduke.

The man smiled and scratched the back of his head, as if something was missing a screw.

"I'm going to be blunt, because this is the situation, and I'm going to say, "You're all very passionate about this, and it's not going to do anybody any good to fight right now, so why don't we just sort it out and then we can talk about it further?"

The man who appeared out of nowhere cut to the chase.

She's not interested in the grimoire, but he makes no secret of the dungeon's purpose.

By the time you break through the maze, there's no doubt about each other's skills.

We're not going to do anyone any good by fighting now, so let's just clear the way and then go for each other's throats.

A woman whose intentions are unknown.

A man whose intentions are too obvious.

The Archduke thought for a moment, then nodded.

"I will."

The Archduke agrees, saying that it would be a disservice to each other to divide up the numbers even before the true nature of the dungeon is revealed.

"Raphael de Saint-Antoine."

At the Archduke's introduction, the man smiled.

"as Dwin."

This was also a new name to the Archduke.

Episode 417.

I'm choking.

"Uh......."

Without any rhyme or reason, I stopped dead in my tracks, feeling as if someone had suddenly squeezed the air out of my lungs.

"Reinhardt? What's wrong?"

"......Are you in shock?"

I checked out the information on the bodies and talked to them in another room for a while, but suddenly I felt strange and Herriot and Bertus looked at me.

"No, just some......."

No, it's not like that.

I've definitely seen some horrific sights, but there's no reason to suddenly choke up.

The sensation of not being able to breathe, as if someone is choking you for no reason or premonition.

An uncanny feeling that something big is about to happen. This intense feeling of anxiety for no reason or cause was something I'd felt before.

It was similar to the symptoms of panic disorder I used to suffer from when I had a lot on my plate. The sudden sense of crisis in a calm state was both unfamiliar and familiar.

"What's wrong....... Reinhard......."

He held my hand steady as I broke out in a cold sweat and shivered. It made me feel somewhat better, but I couldn't escape the strange feeling.

I used to have panic disorder. I know this isn't the kind of feeling that comes from that.

This is a chi warning.

I've never felt so close to a crisis that I couldn't breathe.

What's going on, no, what's happening?

Is there a chance that Lothar Dwyn will attack us from the Ministry of Magic, or something like that, and if so, hasn't he left the Ministry yet?

I had never felt this level of pressure before, so I was afraid that something was going to happen that was going to be different, but I wouldn't know what it was until it happened.

Something will happen.

You don't know what it is, so you can't freak out about it.

"Whoa....... Uh, that just came out of nowhere."

Taking a deep breath, Bertus smirked.

"I thought it looked familiar, but I guess it wasn't?"

"I can't believe it. I can't stop thinking about...... I can't stop thinking about......."

They seemed to think I was traumatized by what I had seen.

It was such a horrible sight that I'm not surprised I had this reaction.

The real reason was different, but when I seemed to calm down, Bertus crossed his arms and began to talk.

"By the way, did you know that Lothar Dwin wanted to know where the grimoire came from?"

"Yeah, I'd say he's kind of covetous....... I think he was more curious about where the grimoire came from than anything else....... I wonder if that's why he tortured people like that."

He did this not for the money, but for the source of the grimoires. Of course, they took all the grimoires.

Those words reinforced my suspicion that Lothar Dwyn was a member of the Cantus Magna.

"Maybe there's a newly discovered Richie's grave in that Darklands....... I think that's what I was thinking."

"Oh, you mean......?"

Bertus narrowed his eyes.

"Hmmm. It's certainly possible to think that way......."

Bertus' reaction suggests that the grimoire that was stolen yesterday was located in Ritchie's tomb, so the bait I and the Black Order laid wasn't the one that got them here.

"The important thing is that Lothar Dwyn wouldn't have gotten the information he really wanted by torturing three dead wizards."

This would mean that the dead were unaware of the source of the grimoire.

"More importantly, how the hell did Lothar Dwyn get out of the Imperial Palace, let alone the Ministry of Magic......."

"You said you have no record of leaving the Ministry of Magic and no record of leaving the Imperial Palace."

"Right."

At Herriot's question, Bertus nodded.

"First of all, it's clear that Lothar Dwyn was faking his skills, and based on the level of recording, he shouldn't have been able to handle any of the officers in the first place, but all three of them were subdued and tortured."

Aside from his dabbling in black magic, Lothar Dwyn was actually a mage of even greater prowess.

"But you can't spatially travel inside the palace like you can inside a temple. If you want to leave the Ministry of Magic, you have to go through the Ministry's main gate, and if you want to leave the Imperial Palace, you have to go through the Imperial Palace's four gates......."

I don't know if it's possible to fly in and out like Sarkhegar did. I don't know if Dwyn can transform into a sparrow, but even if she does, I don't think it's possible unless she's completely transformed into that creature like Sarkeghar. I'm sure there's a dispel field in the air.

"But we've searched the entire Ministry of Magic building, and there's no sign of him, and even if he somehow managed to escape, he'd still be in the palace. It's impossible for him to hide with a simple camouflage spell or invisibility."

The only plausible assumption is that Dwyn is hiding somewhere, but he's not in the Ministry of Magic, and they're searching the entire palace and not finding him.

You don't have access to spatial travel, and there's no way you could have casually walked out of the Ministry of Magic building with a cloaking spell.

A man who had the audacity to commit murder in an imperial palace could not possibly be an ordinary man.

If I'm Cantus Magna, can I neutralize the shielding and get away with it?

No.

Probably not.

This is the Imperial Ministry of Magic.

The building itself is huge, and there are probably many departments that fulfill different roles, like the magical research library here.

It's a misconception that spatial travel is impossible within the Imperial Palace.

For now, I'll just set up a spatial travel zone in the basement of the Palace of Spring and set up a warp gate there.

Obviously, I've traveled from outside to inside as well as inside to outside through those tiny gates.

"By any chance, doesn't the Ministry of Magic have some sort of facility for researching warp gates?"

Bertus and Herriot shook their heads at my words.

\* \* \*

Warp Gates are basically Imperial magic.

It makes sense, then, that warp gate research would be conducted by the Imperial Ministry of Magic, which is neither a mage guild nor a magical association, and that it would have facilities for warp gate research underground.

As such, it was inevitable that there would be a small, if not very large, warp gate inside the facility, as research into warp gates was ongoing.

All research had been put on hold due to a murder at the Ministry of Magic, so Bertus called in a representative to speak with him.

"That....... I don't think that's possible."

When asked if the gates here could be activated to connect to gates outside, the researcher shook his head.

"The gates here are not made to a common standard, most of them are research gates for specialized applications. Most of the gates are unfinished, so you can find them here......."

"You mean you have a gate that works?"

There are a lot of gates, but if there's one that works, that means there's a way in," Bertus said.

"Yes. There are working warp gates, and there are definitely non-testing warp gates....... But it's probably not possible to get out of it."

"Why?"

"All of the warp gates that are made in this facility are not regular gates. The gates inside the facility are meant to be connected to the gates outside to create a view of the entire gate system, so these gates have never been connected to the gates outside."

"If it's never been connected, it can be connected, right?"

"Then we'll have to go through the trouble of including these warp gates in the regular imaginary dimension map."

"What does that mean?"

Bertus didn't seem to understand when I said something that only warp gate technicians knew, and neither did I. All I know is that a map of the imaginary dimension is like a subway map.

Herriot looks at Bertus and says.

"Warp gates need rules to determine which gates they connect to and which ones they don't, so each gate needs to specify which gate it's going to synchronize with."

If you want to include a regular gate in your imaginary dimension map, you'll need to add it to the system as a whole, although the gate will also need to exist as a facility of its own.

"So you can't connect without that process?"

"If we connect the gate here to the outside gate without the correct coordinates, it might collide with the path of the other gate, which would cause dimensional distortion and cause......."

"Enough with the complicated story, accidents happen, what kind of accidents?"

"It's also possible that the gate at the arrival point could be affected, causing everyone using the gate at the arrival point to be blown away to a 'place that doesn't exist', not to mention anyone trying to use it to go outside. Of course, I don't know if such a place exists....... There have been quite a few cases in the past where people have experimented with gates and never returned."

Bertus' eyes widened, as did mine and Harriet's.

Where it doesn't exist.

I'm going to be blown away into a nether dimension, and I'm not going to be able to return to the realm.

"So, escape through this gate is impossible?"

"You could try to escape by activating the gate, and you might actually get there safely, but....... It's too risky. It would be a gamble with your life."

I don't know the details, but the principle is simple.

If you add an extra line to a subway station that's already working as calculated by many people, the trains will crash into each other, ruining the line and killing passengers.

The Warp Gate is both a train station and a train itself.

Even if the trains and trains were ready, it would be insane to use this warp gate to escape to the ecliptic, as laying tracks without thorough calculation would cause a major accident.

So if you're using a gate that's already active, you're traveling down a path that's already been created.

In this case, you're creating a path that doesn't exist. This makes it a high-risk gamble.

The artifact I have that leads to the basement of the Palace of Spring is a warp gate distortion device of sorts, but what people don't realize is that the gate to the basement of the Palace of Spring is also a warp gate designed to communicate properly with the outside world.

The representative said that escaping through the facility's gate was impossible and a gamble with one's life.

"No....... would have done it."

But," Harriet said, her voice trembling.

"Saint-Thuan, what does that mean?"

Herriot's face went white at Bertus's question.

"If you had understood the map I showed you yesterday....... you would have been able to......."

I was the only one who could understand Herriot's words.

While I don't understand exactly what Herriot did yesterday, I do know that he did something that will help improve the warp gate system.

And as a lawyer, Dwin saw the results of Herriot's work firsthand.

He's not a geek, he's an expert on warp gate systems.

Calmly, Herriot explained the events of yesterday - or, to be more precise, his theory, not Darwin's.

"A wizard with no knowledge of the warp gate system might not have been able to figure it out, but he was an expert. He understood my theory as soon as he saw it. I didn't use my theory. I annotated the whole thing on a map of an imaginary dimension, so....... If there's a loophole somewhere because some gate is connected in a certain way, or there's a blank in the dimensional coordinates, or for efficiency's sake......."

The uninitiated may not know how to deal with gates, but Rosser-Dwin was an expert in gate theory.

I used what Herriot wrote to formulate his theory.

To formulate his theory, Herriot annotated every existing map of imaginary dimensions.

We interpreted all the piles of imaginary dimensional maps that were beyond the comprehension of many experts, and analyzed all the warp gate connection paths.

"So, even though you can't connect a single warp gate globally, if you understood the map I gave you, you should be able to calculate a safe path to connect to a specific gate."

Herriot's theory is too early to be used in practice.

But as a scientist, Darwin used evidence to make theories, not theories.

The spider web of gates and connections between them was a challenge to organize, but it wasn't hard to create a single, secure path to a specific gate.

"Sure, it's a risky and unproven method....... It's definitely something worth trying......."

By the time Herriot showed him the map, Lothar Dwin was planning the crime.

As he contemplated his escape route after the crime, Herriot showed him the best way out.

"Somehow....... seemed to like it more than a little......."

Beyond the last time he saw the suspect in the crime, Herriot was frozen when he realized he'd been used to escape the Zodiac.

Bertus bit his lip, a serious expression on his face.

"Well, then, it's pretty clear that Lothar Dwin used this facility to escape."

"Sorry....... Sorry......."

At Herriot's blushing apology, Bertus grinned bitterly.

"He was going to get out anyway, he killed three people here, so he was probably going to kill them all on the way out, but because you gave him a safer escape route, what could have been a dozen or a hundred deaths ended with only three."

"......."

so we don't know what Dwin's actual combat power is.

But it easily overpowered three high-ranking mages and killed them.

Even if he had taken a cue from Herriot's suggestion in the first place and made his escape, Lothar Dwin had already planned the crime.

This means that he already had the confidence to escape the palace by force, even if it wasn't through the gate.

So if you were inspired by Herriot's words and escaped through the gate, then what should have been more people dying ended with less people dying.

"Even if it's not, make me think it is."

You have to think that way, even if it's not true.

I appreciated Bertus' words, even though he wasn't a party to them.

\* \* \*

Charlotte and Ellen's investigation didn't lead them to anything conclusive, but rather to suspicions.

Allegations involving Reinhardt.

Charlotte and Ellen didn't have a conversation about where that might lead.

Because the moment you talk about it, something you don't want to imagine might become a reality.

They walked on without saying a word.

Charlotte's next stop was the Identity Bureau of the Zodiac.

It would soon serve as the town hall.

"Even if he's using an alias, he's still registered, and we might be able to trace something back to him. He's probably lying about where he's from and stuff like that, but that in itself might be enough to deduce when he started operating in the ecliptic."

"I see."

A Darklands spy who operated under the pseudonym Elena.

For now, Charlotte was going to track her down as far as she could.

Even a fake identity would have been registered at some point, so there would be a record of where it came from, and in fact, Charlotte had seen her ID and asked her questions, but she didn't remember any of those details, including where she came from.

Obviously, you shouldn't have access to such personal information, but Charlotte is a princess.

Just as Bertus could look up the biographies of all the citizens of the Zodiac with a word, so can Charlotte.

"Show me all the identities registered under the name Elena on the ecliptic."

"Yes, I'll have it ready in no time."

Suddenly, the empress appeared and demanded the documents, and the director began to pace.

In the Director of Administration's office, Ellen and Charlotte waited for the materials to be ready.

They both knew that Elena wasn't the one to dig now.

I don't want to admit it, I don't want to think about it.

Reinhardt's a winner.

You don't have to say it, they know it.

"......."

"......."

They didn't say anything because they knew that if they started talking, something would go very wrong.

How long has it been since then.

"Here you go."

We had a list of all the people in the ecliptic named Elena.

Charlotte would deduce the period of activity from the place of birth and date of registration, and later call the shop's landlord to find out more about Elena.

That's why Charlotte handed over the paperwork for the same-named person.

"This is it."

-pulp

Charlotte pulled out a piece of identification that matched the face of the Elena she remembered.

Charlotte already knew Elena's face, all she needed was the written information.

But.

The documents were the final piece of evidence for Ellen.

"Wait....... Wait......."

"Huh?"

"Me, this person......."

Ellen's voice trembles.

"I know this guy."

Charlotte's eyes narrowed at that.

"What? Where have you seen this guy before?"

Ellen has a good memory. So it was inevitable that she would realize something.

"On a group mission last year in the second semester....... In that castle....... a statue that looks just like him....... I saw......."

I thought it was a different face, but subtly resembled a gargoyle.

A mage named Lelia, who briefly accompanied you in the Darklands.

And the discovery of a gargoyle resembling Lelia in the castle of Epiax.

It stuck with Ellen so strongly that seeing Elena's photo brought the memory back to her.

"A statue? Why does the castle have a statue of him?"

"This person......."

Ellen murmurs, her voice trembling, in intense shock.

"It's a dragon......."

"What the fuck....... No, what the hell are you talking about?"

Charlotte barely suppressed the curse word that threatened to escape her lips as she wondered if this was supposed to be a joke.

But regardless of Charlotte's consternation, Ellen's complexion was turning blue.

Lelia, a mysterious sorceress who claimed to be a dragon.

A statue resembling Lelia in the castle of Epiax.

And a photo of Elena, who looks just like the statue.

In Ellen's memory, the photos of Lelia and Elena never looked like the same person.

But when a connection was made in the middle - a statue, a kind of neutralized look - that was the only thing that came to Ellen's mind.

Lelia, a mage who hid her true skills and followed them.

Reinhardt was there, too.

Ellen has a good memory.

"......Wouldn't it be nice to have one of our own wizards?

Lelia, a self-proclaimed dragon mage, was brought in by Reinhardt on purpose, albeit by accident.

"......."

Ellen couldn't help but squint at Elena's photo.

Episode 418.

As Dwin, he never left the Ministry of Magic or the ecliptic.

It was almost a given that he would have used the Ministry of Magic's warp gate research facility to escape.

Of course, that's not a sure thing, so the Imperial Palace and Ministry of Magic are on high alert.

Bertus, Herriot, and I left the Ministry of Magic building. The entourage followed at a distance, and we walked in silence through the palace.

Herriot was still frozen by the realization that he had unwittingly helped a criminal escape.

"We're searching Dwyn's home, but he wouldn't have left anything behind that could be used as evidence....... And even if we don't know his true level as a mage, if he escaped, it's virtually impossible to catch him."

concludes that if Dwin left the palace last night, it is impossible to trace him.

Bertus looked very uncomfortable, and rightly so.

It's happening inside the palace, and they can't catch the culprit.

"I may not have caught him, but I was able to figure out a few things."

Bertus deduces the truth from the events that did and did not happen.

"He did this for the grimoire, not for the grimoire itself, if Saint-Thuan is to be believed."

"......Yes."

Dwyn was more curious about the source of the grimoire than the spellbook.

"But the victimized mages didn't know where the grimoire came from, and importantly, the people who were most likely to know where it came from couldn't raid it."

The only person who had the confidence to escape the Ministry, but who might know where the grimoire came from.

In other words, you haven't touched the emperor.

So, as good as Dwin is, he's not good enough to single-handedly break the Tetra. Of course, where would someone like that be?

"I can't believe someone like that has managed to sneak into the Imperial Palace....... If he's one of the Devil's minions, I'm going to be in trouble."

Bertus was silent for a moment, lost in thought. Of course, there is no connection between Lothar Dwyn and I, but when something suspicious happens in the Empire, it is inevitable that it could be the work of a demon.

"I hope you don't mind me asking, but....... Where did you get that spellbook, actually?"

"Oh, that."

as the crucial reason why Dwin murdered people.

"I don't know about that."

Bertus doesn't know.

"All I know is that Charlotte got it from somewhere."

With that, I couldn't help but realize where the spellbook was coming from.

I thought the adventurers had gotten it from Richie's tomb, but it turns out that Charlotte got it from the basement of the Demon Castle.

"Wait, doesn't that mean Charlotte is in danger?"

Bertus shrugged at my nervous question.

"Well, very few people know that the stolen grimoire was taken by Charlotte, and none of the people who died yesterday."

Fortunately, Lothar Dwyn is unable to discover the source of the grimoire, and is forced to flee the palace, leaving Charlotte in his wake.

"From what I've heard, it's likely that he thinks Ritchie's tomb is the source of the grimoire. I don't know why, but....... If he really wanted to know where the grimoire came from, he might have gone there."

Bertus looks at me with a subtle smile.

"And, Reinhard, you somehow seem to know the true source of the spellbook."

"......."

"Well, I'm not going to force it."

I could have lied, but I knew it wouldn't work with Bertus.

As Bertus says, Dwyn would have fled the palace without ever discovering the true source of the grimoire.

If so, Charlotte is not in danger.

If Dwyn was right about Cantus Magna, they would soon be approaching Reach's tomb in the Darklands.

They want a large collection of rare grimoires, and they're going to assume that the real source is Richie's tomb, not the basement of Demon City.

Of course, even if the true source is not there, the rumor that rare grimoires are being found in Lich's tomb is enough for Cantus Magna to approach it.

Something is coming.

What kind of reality will this gut-wrenching warning become, and what kind of reality will it be?

I couldn't figure it out.

And.

-Charge!

In the distance, someone was running, panting, with an urgent messenger. The messenger, who had raced to our location in the nick of time, whispered something to Bertus with an urgent look on his face.

Bertus's brow furrowed grimly as he listened.

"......What is it, are you sure?"

"Yes, Your Highness."

Bertus chewed on his lip as Harriet and I glared at him.

I wasn't sure if I was stunned or angry. Probably a little bit of both.

"Apparently, there's a secret room in Lothar Dwin's house, and I just discovered it."

Secret Room.

Was there any evidence there?

"But the stolen spellbooks are just sitting there?"

"What?"

"...... Why?"

"What the fuck are you doing?"

Bertus cursed at this incomprehensible situation.

\* \* \*

Bertus, Herriot, and I left the palace.

Bertus wanted to check it out for himself, and so did I.

"......."

"What is this......."

"You know, really......."

and entered the secret chamber in Dwynn's home to find numerous spellbooks strewn across the floor.

It was a lot of stuff. It was too much for Charlotte to have brought on her own, so I wondered if she had a magic backpack.

it's clear that Dwin stole the spellbook and escaped the palace.

Most importantly, he's gone, leaving the stolen grimoires in a secret room.

I'm pretty sure I've read all the books, because they're all laid out in front of me.

More importantly, if he was Cantus Magna, he'd need a spellbook, so why the hell would he throw it away?

Did you memorize it well enough to make a new copy?

"You wouldn't have thought this room would go undiscovered......."

"I suppose."

Bertus nodded at Herriot's words. He couldn't have trusted the secret chamber and left it like this. It would have been discovered so quickly.

Bertus's face was set in a grim line.

Why and for what reason.

It was the same for me.

The creature, presumably Cantus Magna, threw down the grimoire and evaporated.

Of course, the grimoire itself may not be important to the Cantus Magna. They may have specialized devices for recording and remembering magic.

But one thing's for sure.

The scattered spellbooks suggest that Lothar Dwyn was in a hurry.

"I think he went to Richie's grave."

Bertus and Harriet nodded at my words.

If Herriot was right, Lothar Dwyn was still curious about the grimoire's provenance, and if it was the provenance that mattered, not the grimoire, then it was very possible that he was heading to Ritchie's tomb with the wrong information.

Now that you have these scrolls, do you think you'll be the one to take them before someone else breaks through Richie's Tomb?

If Cantus Magna's full force is directed at Lich's tomb, the fight may not be enough for Antrianus and the Black Order inside the dungeon.

Bertus grinds his teeth until they make a sound.

"Yeah, I'd love nothing more than to find out what's in that rumored tomb of Richie's, and maybe even get a piece of the motherfucker who had the audacity to mess with the imperial court."

Bertus calls out to the entourage waiting outside the secret chamber.

"Summon Shanapelle and the Imperial Mages!"

The outraged cry of the First Prince rang out.

Following Cantus Magna, the Empire's finest are headed to the Tomb of the Reach.

This was getting out of hand. Bertus looks at me thoughtfully.

"Reinhardt."

"Uh."

"You go, too."

I thought he was going to exclude me, but Bertus' judgment was not what I expected.

"Capturing a suspect in an assassination within the Imperial Palace and breaking through Ritchie's Tomb is a feat for a rookie warrior."

Bertus is making a judgment call to take advantage of the situation to the extreme. He's thinking about how to make the best out of a crisis.

For the deeds of a warrior.

I personally couldn't come up with a good enough reason to go there either.

"Yeah."

Bertus nodded at my answer.

"Me, too!"

Then, a restless Herriot interrupted.

"I want to....... I want to go to......."

Despite her fears, she felt responsible for the situation. Even I was going, and it was natural for her to want to come along.

Bertus stares at Herriot.

After all, Bertus doesn't want me to grab Dwyne and run through Richie's Tomb myself.

Shanapelle and the Imperial Mages will do the bulk of the work, and I'll have a foot in the door.

It's unlikely that I'm in any real danger.

"Sure, if that's what you want."

That's why Bertus granted the request, without disparaging or dismissing Herriot's courage.

\* \* \*

Bertus ordered me and Herriot to join the Imperial elite as they made their way to Reach's tomb.

However, they could not depart immediately, as they needed to be assembled and prepared. The Shanapelle knights and imperial mages are not permanently stationed at the palace, but are often dispatched on various missions, so it takes time to assemble them.

At least one day.

You have one day left.

As such, Herriot and I have decided to return to the temple to regroup. Bertus will return to the palace to discuss this matter with the Emperor.

It was clear that this was going to be an overly dangerous fight.

I join for the achievement of a new warrior, and Herriot joins because he feels responsible for the situation.

And I had to get the news to Lucinil as soon as possible.

Cantus Magna will come, but it will be with the full force of the Empire.

Herriot's expression was grave.

"It must be dangerous, right?"

Silent, Herriot could only say.

"Dangerous, of course."

"......."

"Not us, they'll be there."

"......?"

Herriot chirped at my ramblings.

"No, of course not, we'll have the Imperial Mage Corps swarming with Archmages, and Shanapels full of Swordmasters moving around us, so what's the danger to us, the danger to the people we'll encounter?"

That's the problem, now.

The Empire's finest, clearly out of their depth in the Labyrinth, are about to crush their few remaining subordinates and allies!

We don't have to worry about it, you do!

"Is that how it works......?"

"Sure. So we'll just watch from a distance and be done with it."

Here's the thing.

Then it's very likely that it will be the Imperials, not me.

If so, it's impossible for me to get the information.

I obeyed Bertus' order to follow him, just in case there was a way.

I don't know how to do this.

We are in no danger. I believe that no matter how many mages there are in Cantus Magna, they can't hold a candle to the Empire's finest.

For now, I had to get back to the template and tell the story quickly.

\* \* \*

The clues were plentiful.

But Charlotte suddenly said to Ellen.

Today.

Let's call it a day.

Let's go back to the templates and clear our heads.

Fear and dread flashed in Charlotte's eyes.

You don't want to find out you've done something irreversible.

Desperate for it to remain a possibility.

Ellen and Charlotte felt the same mixed emotions. Knowing what each other was feeling, Ellen and Charlotte decided to take that final, decisive step, at least for now.

Stone statue of Lelia, or Elena, in the castle of Epiax.

They planned to go there tomorrow.

After returning to the temple, Ellen and Charlotte returned to their respective dorms.

Even if you try not to think about it, you'll still hear it.

However, we're not sure of anything yet, so we don't want to commit to anything.

Until something is confirmed and you are convinced, nothing happens.

Even though you're afraid of the unknown.

So Ellen missed Reinhard.

There's no stopping it, so Charlotte and Ellen have to find out more. And they will find out something more.

So now.

Unless, of course, it turns out that it's all just a misunderstanding and an illusion.

So.

Now.

-Smart

Ellen knocked on Reinhardt's door.

I've seen him out with Harriet, so maybe he hasn't returned to the Temple yet, and I wonder when he will. I turn to walk away.

-delay

"......."

"......."

Reinhardt, looking a little gaunt, cautiously opened the door.

"Why? Training? I can't do it today......."

Reinhard was not feeling up to training today. Ellen looked at Reinhardt's face, and a jumble of thoughts raced through her mind.

Ellen wants to ask something right away, but she's afraid it might change something irrevocably, so she decides not to.

"Can I come in?"

Reinhardt was a little taken aback by Ellen's comment, but he opened the door as if it were no big deal.

Room A-11. Upon entering Reinhardt's room, Ellen sits down on Reinhardt's bed.

Reinhardt seemed to recognize Ellen's look, and sat down in the chair in front of his desk.

"Here."

"......?"

-Taktak

Ellen slapped her palm against the bed next to her.

"Can't I sit here?"

At Ellen's words, Reinhardt seemed to stutter a bit, then rose from his chair and sat down next to Ellen.

Ellen said nothing for a moment, staring blankly ahead.

What Reinhardt hasn't been able to tell us, what they really were.

With the balloon inflated to the limit and about to burst, Ellen and Charlotte stopped blowing it up.

A little more.

It's a balloon that's about to burst with one more breath.

Hence this brief moment.

It's before the balloon bursts, so we can still be together.

The questions are many.

Why are you so helpful to everyone, and why are you as sweet as you are tough.

Have you taken good care of it.

So maybe not, Ellen still believes.

The faith in Reinhardt is still strong.

Ellen says, wiggling her fingers.

"What did you do today? I heard something happened at the imperial palace....... happened at the palace."

I've seen Harriet and Temple leave, and I've heard from Charlotte, so I have a general idea of what Reinhardt has been up to today.

"I think Harriet might be involved in that, see if you can find out anything....... We went around a bit."

Yes.

Like this.

Reinhardt, who always cares and looks out for everyone, wouldn't do that.

If that were the case, there would be no reason for Reinhardt to try, try, try. He's not Reinhardt, because he doesn't do things for no reason.

What Reinhardt thinks is suspicious is probably just an illusion created by coincidental circumstances.

"Did you figure something out?"

"I don't think there's much more we could have gleaned from it, since we have ....... Well, maybe what Harriet knew was a hint, and......."

"I see."

What I did today.

What you're going to do tomorrow.

What you're eating tonight.

We've talked about a lot of things that don't matter.

Forever.

I've always wanted to do that.

Ellen turns to Reinhard. Reinhardt meets Ellen's gaze, a little falteringly.

Reinhardt is Reinhardt.

And Ellen is Ellen.

They may still be that way to each other.

"Reinhardt."

"......."

So while we're still each other.

Ellen wanted to do something she could only do now, something she wouldn't be able to do later.

Ellen carefully hugged Reinhardt's neck.

"!"

I kissed him right back.

Ellen could feel Reinhardt's body go rigid in her embrace.

After a kiss that seemed like an eternity.

"Sorry......."

Ellen parted her slightly moistened lips and apologized.

Reinhardt's eyes widened, more surprised at Ellen's abrupt behavior than embarrassed.

"If it's not now, I don't think I ever will......."

With that, he left Reinhardt's room.

Episode 419.

I debated whether or not to tell Ellen that I'd decided to head to Richie's grave because she'd come to visit, but I didn't.

I didn't want to drag Ellen into the mix when Harriet was already nervous, and she'd definitely try to follow me if I told her.

I don't know if Bertus will try to get Ellen involved, but for now, I don't want her there.

So I'm trying to figure out what to do, and then Ellen does something out of the blue.

I thought he had something to say, but I didn't expect him to kiss me.

I wondered if she had a change of heart or something, but she didn't really explain, just said she was sorry and left.

The unfamiliar feel of my lips, the look in Ellen's eyes, replayed in my head.

It's not the time to think about that.

I wondered what Ellen was thinking, and why she'd walked out without telling me, but I wasn't in a position to think about that right now.

I went straight to calling Lucinyl.

"Are you sure?"

I explained the situation to Rusinil as quickly as I could, and he replied with a serious look.

"Lothar Dwyn may not be a cantus magna, but once he is, the elite of the Empire will be heading to the tomb of the Reach."

Even if it's not Cantus Magna, it's certain that the best of the Empire will be entering Reach's tomb now. Quantum Maze might break through, and after that, the fight could get too big to handle.

"I've decided to join the Imperial forces and head to Ritchie's Tomb, because in the worst case scenario, we may have to withdraw, and in some cases, we may have to fight, and we need to get at least one mage from Cantus Magna. I need to get the word out to the Order and the Council as soon as possible, and I need you to get the word out to Sarkegar and Loyaar."

"Okay."

With those words, Lucinil dissolved into mist.

You're trying to catch Cantus Magna, but the Empire's finest are coming with you. Should you withdraw when this may be your only chance to capture Cantus Magna?

If the Empire takes all of your cantus magna, or you all die before you get the information, things get ugly.

And it's entirely possible that if you get it wrong, you'll give them a reason to complete Akasha.

Today at the earliest, tomorrow at the latest, I'm heading to the tomb of the Reach with the forces of the Empire.

There's nothing you need to bring with you.

I felt like praying.

I don't believe in gods.

And I can't pray to anyone, because if there is a God, I am the real God of this world.

I am the only body in the world that cannot pray to anyone.

I am God.

And my power is the word.

"Everything will be fine."

Therefore, I pray to me.

"Let's make it all work."

After all, I have to be good at it.

\* \* \*

Saturday night.

An emergency meeting had been called in a land ruled by eternal winter.

Normally, only members of the Vampire Council would be seated at the round table in the Great Hall, but the nature of the Council had changed slightly, and due to the specifics of the current situation, non-vampires were gathered here.

The patriarchs of the four families of Lord Vampires, with the exception of Antrianus, who is in charge of Reach's tomb among the original members.

Elise, Lucinil, Lerouen, and Galarshga.

And Sarkegar, a minion of Valie's.

Eppinhauser, a member of the Black Order, was also present.

In fact, most of them were there, with the exception of Rynkanslope Loyaar.

"Are you certain that he is a member of the Cantus Magna?"

Lucinil narrowed her eyes at Eleris's question.

"I can't say for sure, it's all circumstantial, but to be able to do something like that in the palace and get away with it, and to have his eye on so many grimoires, it's just plain weird if he's not Cantus Magna, and if this is Cantus Magna, it means he's decided to go all in on this case, no matter what he's been doing. Surely they're going to focus all their resources on Richie's tomb now, and even if they don't, there's no telling what might happen if he salivates at the bait we've laid out."

At Lucinil's words, Galarsh crossed his arms and nodded.

"That's important, but more important is the fact that the full force of the Empire is headed there. The tomb will be breached, and I doubt we'll be able to save the mages of Cantus Magna."

Just as the Temple's banner was raised with the goal of fostering excellence regardless of status, so too is Shanapelle and the Imperial Mage Corps a home for such "fostered" talent.

They are humanity's strongest group, filled with individuals of exceptional talent and aptitude, as well as proven loyalty to humanity and the Empire.

No secret society, no matter how powerful, can match the concentration of power in one place by a group of sifted and filtered superhumans.

From there, they take out key members of the Cantus Magna without killing them.

"Maybe we shouldn't bet on such a low probability and just pull out, because if we bleed to death trying to get to the clue that is Cantus Magna, we might not be able to get back?"

Lerouen said it might be best to consider pulling out.

Initially, only Elise, Lucinil, and Antrianus were fully committed to working with the council.

Galarsh and Llewellyn had agreed to cooperate as much as they could, but they weren't willing to give their lives for Valier.

I was willing to walk away if things got too dangerous.

Lerouen's judgment is not entirely unreasonable, as taking on Cantus Magna and the Empire at the same time to learn the truth about a mysterious artifact called Akasha would be insanity beyond measure.

"I agree with Lerouen. If it's just Cantus Magna, it's too much of a risk to take on the Empire."

Galarsch said.

At that, Sarkegar, in the form of a normal human male, spoke up, his voice filled with concern.

"But didn't our lord say he was heading to that place?"

"Right."

Lucinil nodded at Sarkegar's words.

"We're heading to the tomb with Imperial forces, so her safety shouldn't be too much of a threat, but we don't know how much power Cantus Magna will bring to the table, so we can't be entirely sure. And even if we do go, we may not necessarily be in the fight. We can watch from a distance and intervene if it seems like we're needed. And, well, if they've captured a mage from Cantus Magna, we might be able to sneak up on them later."

Lucinil stares at Sarkegar.

"You're not good at that, are you?"

Lucinil and Sarkegar had met a few times to keep in touch, so Lucinil was already familiar with Sarkegar's power.

Sarkegarda is better at camouflage and infiltration than direct combat.

"They deserve to be called experts."

At this confident statement, Eppinhauser stared at Sarkeghar. But he didn't really say anything.

"I'm sure the Imperials would rather capture them than kill them all, and it's never too late to find out why they did what they did and hang them, but Cantus Magna has decided to go all out, so we need to be ready."

"Lucinil, are you saying you're going to be there?"

At Lucinil's words, Lerouen stared at the silver-haired girl, puzzled.

"Yeah, I'm gonna do that."

"I don't understand why Rusinil is so eager to defend his......."

Lucinil crossed her arms at Lerouen's words.

"Pretty girls are meant to be given rice cakes, and I think we have enough pretty girls in Bali."

Lucinil smirked, and Lerouen sighed heavily, as if he didn't understand.

It just so happens that Lucinil is organizing the meeting.

There are six of us in the room.

Roussinil, Ellerys, Sarkozy, Effinghauser, Leroux, Galarsch.

We decided that someone would keep an eye on the situation and intervene if necessary, just in case something happened to Richie's grave.

"I'm going anyway, raise your hand if you're not going to be there."

At that, Lerouen threw up his hands.

"......?"

Lerouen was the only one to raise his hand.

"......Galarsh, are you so old you're deaf?"

To the oldest vampire, who was seriously worried about the aging of vampires, Galarsh simply replied, "I'm not.

"I'm going to go."

"Is that ......?"

Like Lerouen, Galarsch is not one to cooperate with Valier, so it was expected that he would be absent, but he comes along.

Lerouen watches Galarsh's vicious expression.

Galarsh is staring at Lucinil, who is shivering. It's clear that he's following her because he's worried about her.

"Ah, this disingenuous monster......."

"Loud, ears."

"What, what?! Cute?"

"You're the one who called me a monster first."

Effinghauser could only watch as the elves and orc vampires bickered.

In the end, it was decided that all but Lerouen would go to the field.

"I'm not usually this swept up in things....... Obviously not......."

Lerouen muttered under his breath, feeling a bit out of place when everyone else was going and he didn't want to be left out when it wasn't his decision to make.

"No, Lerouen, you're the kind of person who gets swept away."

Rusinil said.

"Well, it certainly does."

Eleris added.

"In my judgment, having seen you long enough to know, you're no good."

And to the very end of Galash.

With memories reset in 200-year increments, the Lord Vampires, who had been watching Lerouen for longer than he had, were more accurate.

Knowing that made the elven vampire's already pale complexion turn even whiter.

"G....... Really?"

"Yeah, that's always my reaction when I realize that you think you have a strong point of view, but you're really just a go-getter."

Lerouen's jaw dropped at Lucinil's words.

"Do you think I....... can't......?"

In fact, Lerouen has no intention of cooperating with Valier, but when Galarsch decides to join Valier's side, he reluctantly agrees.

Eventually.

It was decided that Lerouen, who had no sticks, would go with them to Richie's grave.

Episode 420.

"Something must be going on with you."

At Radia's question, Eleris nodded.

Radia wasn't at the meeting, but she knew from the look on Eleris' face that something was up.

"Yes, I have something important to do, and it's likely to be dangerous."

Elyse lives a tranquil life in a secluded snowy castle, but she's part of the forces that are tearing the world apart. It's only natural that she'd get involved in something dangerous. As she prepares to leave, Radia watches her go.

"I'm going to be gone for a few days, I have plenty of food, but can you take care of yourself?"

"What? Oh....... Sure. Never mind me."

Radia felt a pang of wistfulness at the way Eleris worried that she would be left behind if she went off to do something dangerous.

When she said she was going to do something dangerous, she just looked like she was going for a walk. When she said she was going to get groceries, she looked no different than when she left the house.

"Bye then."

"Oh, yeah......."

Radia could only nod at Eleris's brief greeting.

Elise leaves the room.

She's not sure what he's up to, but Radia stares after him.

Something.

I wanted to say something.

"......be safe."

"......?"

The words from behind her startled Eleris, and she turned to look at Radia.

Hope you're okay.

Simple words, but not the kind of words that would be exchanged between Radia and Elise right now. It meant that Radia had opened up to Elise, and it meant that she cared.

"Okay, I'll be back in one piece."

Eleris smiled faintly and greeted Radia once more.

Radia Schmidt stared at the door through which Elise had exited.

What it would be like to be a real family with Elise.

Blood-bound kin.

Would it make me feel more warm and fuzzy than I already do?

When Elise returns, Radia Schmidt wants to seriously ask her about joining her family.

Radia had kind of figured out that Elise would reject it.

\* \* \*

Sunday, early morning.

Herriot and I headed to the palace.

I don't know how the council meeting will go, or what judgment the Black Order will make.

It would be best if our forces could capture the wizards of Cantus Magna, but if the Imperials succeed in capturing them, we must set up a situation where I can interrogate them.

The worst that can happen is that Cantus Magna is wiped out or you lose them.

Herriot was ready, too, with a scrollbook strapped to his back. She seemed to have prepared a lot of things.

It's just me and Heriot, anyway, and the Imperials are the ones doing the actual work. Bertus is only bringing me along for the achievement, and Herriot isn't much different.

By the time we get to the point where we have to act, something has already happened that is irreversible.

There's no departure speech or anything.

The Empire brings its best and brightest to the palace as quickly as possible, and we secure Ritchie's tomb while searching for Lothar Dwyn, who is likely headed there.

Given that a murder took place inside the palace and he escaped unharmed, Lothar Dwyn is a priority felon to catch.

so it doesn't matter if Dwin isn't there. We just need to make sure that there really is an Akrich in the rumored tomb.

If you can't find Lothar Dwyn in Richie's tomb, you'll just have to track him down another way.

The Empire seemed to be thinking about whether or not Lothar Dwyn was related to the Devil.

Garden in front of the Tetra of the Imperial Palace.

Not surprisingly, Emperor Bertus was not present.

In charge of the site was Saviolin Tana, the director of Chanapelle.

And about thirty knights of Shanapelle. And about thirty wizards from the Imperial Mage Corps.

Scotra Kelton, who we saw last time we were in Lazierne, was also there.

These are all people who have reached the pinnacle of superhumanity.

Saviolin Tana comes out and sees Herriot.

"Both, don't overdo it."

As if they had been warned, the mages and knights begin walking with me and Herriot in the center. We travel through the warp gate, then use mass teleportation in the Darklands to get to the scene immediately.

Saviolin Tana leads the troops from the front.

Things could go badly.

Everything will be fine.

It should all work out.

Nervously, Harriet grabbed my hand.

"You......."

But instead of grabbing my hand because she's scared herself, Harriet looks up at me in confusion.

No wonder.

The sweat was coming more from my side.

Herriot grabbed my hand in fear, then squeezed it harder when he realized I was more nervous.

Like he's not okay himself, but he wants to help me somehow.

\* \* \*

That time.

"Ready?"

"Yes."

Ellen and Charlotte were outside the temple.

It was now full spring, but they were dressed very thickly.

This outfit makes sense because we're going to the poles.

They were headed to High Epirus today.

Charlotte was at the palace, so she knew about yesterday's revelations and what they were trying to do to the empire. And that Reinhardt was headed to Richie's tomb.

We don't know anything about Reinhardt yet.

The suspicion, after all, is small. All we know is that Reinhardt visited Elena's shop with a girl from Temple.

Therefore, Charlotte took no action.

You won't be sure of anything until you're sure of something.

"Something bad is happening."

"Is this about the incident yesterday?"

"Yes."

From an imperial murder to an elite force heading to Richie's tomb, and Reinhardt and Herriot de Saint-Ouen accompanying them.

Charlotte didn't tell Ellen about it.

"We do our job. Because in some cases, what we do might be more important than what they do."

"......."

Ellen and Charlotte's move could make or break an empire.

In either case, I hope this is completely unimportant.

"I'll go see if Ephex has the statue you're talking about, and we'll think about it later."

"Yes."

All of the wizards who were capable of using teleportation were gone now. And Charlotte had no intention of taking anyone other than Ellen on this mission.

Charlotte handed Ellen a scrollbook. It was the same scrollbook that Charlotte was carrying.

"We'll take the gate to the northernmost part of the continent, and from there we'll use the teleportation scroll to enter. We'll do the same on the way back."

"Yeah."

It's not a demonic escape, and very high-level spells like teleportation can be done with scrolls.

A princess is a princess, even if she lost the competition.

"Let's go."

They both hope that what they're doing is a waste of time, of no use, of no value.

With such hope mingled with despair, Ellen and Charlotte headed for the warp gate.

\* \* \*

It wasn't long before they were at the northernmost tip of the continent.

After all, neither Ellen nor Charlotte had a free pass to the Warp Gate.

I used a teleport scroll to get to Castle Epiax, an area without a warp gate.

-Hui Yi Yi

"Ugh....... weather."

The snow was knee-deep at the entrance to the castle during a blizzard. The snow that was already on the ground had compacted into ice.

On their last group mission, Herriot's suggestion that they explore the castle had Ellen and Reinhardt running laps around Ephex.

I knew it was a place where spirits roamed, and there were seven statues in what looked like a pantheon in one of the buildings.

-beep, beep

They walked through a snowy clearing.

"But what did she mean when she said she was a dragon?"

"You said you were a dragon, and you were hiding your skills."

"......and you believed it?"

Charlotte glanced at Ellen as if she believed that bullshit in the deep snow.

"I didn't believe it at the time, but then I saw the statue here and thought maybe this is where dragons used to gather. It's a coincidence."

"Anyway, if the wizard you said accompanied you in the Darklands is Elena, I'd like to know if she's the one......."

Charlotte bit her lip, unable to say more.

If Elena and Lelia are the same person, Reinhardt is too suspicious.

The Empire doesn't know what kind of castle Epiax is, they just care for it like they care for a ruin that's been around for a very long time.

But if the statue that exists here looks like Elena, and it does.

What the hell is this castle doing here?

It's clear that the place is connected to the Devil, but we don't know how, so Charlotte travels to Epiax to see for herself.

"Whoa."

-tuk-tuk

Once inside the castle, Ellen and Charlotte shook off their snow-covered clothes. The air inside the castle was as chilly as the wind outside.

Ellen asked, looking at Charlotte as if it had just dawned on her.

"Are you afraid of ghosts?"

"Ghosts?"

Charlotte tilted her head as if to say, "What are you talking about?

"Here for the ghosts."

"......?"

Charlotte narrowed her eyes at the bottomless pit.

"Not strong enough to harm, but there's a ghost walking around. Do you know......."

-Flash!

As Ellen was about to finish, they saw a flash of light down one of the dimly lit hallways of the castle.

It wasn't a natural phenomenon.

Ellen and Charlotte's faces hardened.

That wasn't the end of the story.

-blink!

Something, a white light that felt like holy light, flashed across the hallway.

-Whoops, as soon as she's gone, she's gone again.......

Someone's voice.

Soon, Ellen and Charlotte could see a figure emerge from the corner of the hallway.

Naturally, you made eye contact with them.

"......?"

An unidentified woman with dark hair was there.

A place with a statue resembling Elena.

Reinhardt stopped by Elena's shop with a dark-haired woman.

Then, a woman with dark hair appeared in front of me.

Charlotte doesn't remember her.

But Ellen has a good memory. As a combat major, she watched the tournament a little more carefully.

Sure enough, I could recognize the face from memory in that impression.

Ellen was able to pull from her memory a picture of herself as an unlimited tournament competitor.

Radia Schmidt, 6th grade.

Olivia Ranze, who withdrew from the tournament final.

Reinhardt stops by Elena's shop with a dark-haired woman.

Paladin family.

The Order of the Nameless.

Olivia Ranze.

Adriana.

Demon Attack.

Somehow.

Reinhardt on that night when he thought he knew it all.

And.

And.......

Someday.

The man who called himself the Devil.

Reinhardt's playful confession.

The pieces of the puzzle begin to come together in Ellen's mind.

"......How do you guys do it?"

Radia Schmidt didn't know Ellen, but she knew the face of Empress Charlotte.

There are two people on the council who shouldn't be there.

"Senior, I need to talk to you."

Ellen slowly approached Radia Schmidt.

Radia Schmidt backed away slowly, her face stony.

Episode 421.

"Not much on the inside, huh?"

"I think so."

In the words of Dwight, the Archduke of Saint-Thuan said, in a wide-open cavity.

There was no need for a bonfire. Everyone here is a mage who can summon a light source on their own.

The dungeon exploration had gotten so long that everyone was spending the day bouncing from bun to bun looking for a place to rest.

"Maybe it was an empty cart, because I don't see any spellbooks making a stir."

"It's not so much that it's invisible as it is that it's intentionally put away."

"That's what I think, too."

Dwin was a man of many words.

The Archduke tended to say only what was necessary.

And the woman was speechless.

Luna was a slow learner. She was a beat behind when Dwyn or the Archduke called her, and she rarely spoke, only nodding or shaking her head slowly in response to most questions.

There were no traps. There were no labyrinths like the one outside.

It's just that I can't let my guard down, so I'm taking my time exploring.

Leading the way was the Archduke, but also Lothar Dwin.

The Archduke couldn't help but notice that Lothar Dwyn was no ordinary wizard. He was a man of many words, but cautious in his actions, and while he led the way, he always seemed to be watching his back.

But a woman who introduced herself as Luna.

She was following the group a bit off to the side, neither leading nor lagging.

She didn't do anything.

I just kept up with the group at a slightly slower pace.

"There's something about you, Luna, that doesn't seem normal."

"I agree."

Archduke St. Thuan nodded in agreement with Dwin's words.

There are no ordinary people in this room, but the one who seems most extraordinary is Luna, who hasn't shown us anything yet.

Even the Archduke's mages watched Luna with a strange reverence as she wore a simple cloak and plain clothes, neither fancy nor luxurious.

You don't know their skills, you don't know their intentions, and you don't know if they're an enemy or an ally.

Everyone was watching, unaware of her slow walk, which somehow felt graceful.

It wasn't mesmerization, but awe mixed with fear.

The interior was overwhelmingly sparse, but in a space where you never know what might be at the bottom of the pit, Luna sometimes looked like she'd just been out for a walk, sweeping the walls.

In fact, she spent the day walking the halls without falling asleep. Stopping now and then, looking off into the distance.

As if in deep thought.

"Let's get going, it's not like we're going to stay long, even if it's nothing special."

"Do you think so?"

At the Archduke's signal, the mages were ready to depart, and Luna watched them prepare to go, then joined them, her pace still slow.

It was weird.

It's a slow pace, but she's never been left behind.

"I don't think you're anything out of the ordinary, Luna."

At Dwyn's smiling words, Luna stays still, looking toward the direction of travel.

"If you look at things unconventionally, what is there in the world that is not conventional?"

"No matter how much you try to look at the extraordinary, there is nothing extraordinary about it, is there?"

At Dwyn's sarcastic question, Luna stares at Dwyn for a moment.

"Not even human. No, less than a being that has ceased to be human."

It was a blank stare, without hostility or favor.

"......Haha, is that right?"

Dwin grinned from ear to ear.

"This guy is not human.

The Archduke caught his breath as he saw Lothair Dwyn's chilling smile.

The old adage of staying away from the personal resurfaced.

It wasn't meant to be, but it doesn't change the fact that you came close.

'As expected, close quarters bring close quarters.

The Archduke walked on, reminding himself that his ancestors had never been wrong.

The Archduke visited the tomb.

Hoping that the other person's grave won't be yours.

"Let's go."

"Yes, Archduke."

"......."

The Archduke led the way.

\* \* \*

Rich's grave was deep and massive.

But what both Lothar Dwyn and the Archduke realized was that while it was a very large space, it was mostly empty. There were no traps or monsters.

"It's not like there was nothing there to begin with."

"I see."

It didn't take a great deal of observation to spot it. There were tons of rooms and facilities in the dungeon, most of which were empty. But the scratches on the walls, the lack of dust, the signs that something had actually been in these spaces, and it had been removed.

"It's like they took it all out and put it away somewhere....... I get that feeling, why would they do that?"

"I don't know about that. But I don't think they were robbed."

It didn't feel like looting, it felt like the entire space had been swept clean.

"We also found many signs of traps, but they were all dismantled."

The Archduke's mages have also been exploring their surroundings, reporting back to the Archduke with their findings.

Lich's Tomb is a magical research facility. Traps are set up to kill or chase away insects that trespass into such research facilities.

However, there is no equipment and all the traps have been dismantled.

"Maybe they've cleared out all the bullshit so that those who have made it through the labyrinth can come straight to it without being distracted by anything else."

"......Is there a reason to do that?"

"I don't own this place, so I have no way of knowing."

The idea that we've cleaned up the clutter so that we can go straight to the heart of the matter is nonsense.

But it was also hard to disagree with him.

The group advanced slowly. This way, they could reassure the entrants, and then they could attack by other means. Given the level of the labyrinth outside, this was no easy task.

The sheer size of the place and the need to be cautious in our movements meant that we had to spend a lot of time exploring.

As he woke up and explored again, he realized that it was nearing night.

After a while of exploring the rooms, corridors, and cavities of the basement, the group soon found themselves stuck in a space.

"......That's weird."

and Dwin paused.

"It's foreign."

"I don't know if I should use this phrase, but it looks like it's a new construction or a renovation or something......."

Whereas everything up to this point has felt old and time-worn in its own way, down here it's a clean, new addition.

A staircase to nowhere.

"I'll have to be careful."

Down, down, down we went, everyone paying attention, convinced that we were entering the heart of the dungeon.

How far down.

"I think this is the deep end."

The depths of the dungeon were shabby.

But it was magnificent.

The light from the sources summoned by the wizards was not enough to illuminate the entire hollow.

-Bam!

The Archduke snapped his fingers, and a huge incandescent light erupted from the ceiling of the chamber, illuminating the entire pupil.

No patterns, no decorations, no nothing, just a huge space.

A shabby, desolate place that doesn't seem dangerous enough to lure people in with a rare grimoire, but simply overwhelms them with the sheer size of the place.

Among them.

There were three wooden chairs.

The three beings were seated on three small stools, not fancy wooden chairs akin to a throne, but shabby little chairs made of wood chips and planks pieced together.

One person wearing a black robe.

A skeleton wearing gray robes.

An elderly man in a black suit and bowler hat, walking with a cane.

They stared at the first group to enter the cavity.

"They own this place."

The Archduke said.

"......."

Luna said nothing, just stood there and watched.

And.

-puddle

"Antirrhinus......."

Dwyn's eyes widened, and he cursed like a man possessed.

-Hooray, a young man who recognizes me.

"It was....... It was you!"

Where had the calm, smiling young wizard gone, and the appearance of Lothar Dwyn had begun to take on a bizarre, ominous quality.

-Two-dunk!

"Because of you......!"

Dwin cries out as tendons begin to sprout in the corners of his eyes.

The old gentleman gets up and takes off his hat to bow.

-Who are you to recognize this phrase?

The old gentleman's words rattled Dwyn, who had been calm until now, and he gritted his teeth.

"For now."

-Pow!

After leaping through space, Dwyn appears in front of the old man with a wry smile on his face, just as he had been all along.

"Fuck you!"

"Ho-ho."

-Crunch!

As Dwyn stretched out his hand, a torrent of magic emanating from it struck the old gentleman.

-Currrrrr!

The torrent of magic that swept through the old gentleman slammed into the cavity behind him, creating a tremendous vibration.

But.

"It recognizes me."

The elderly gentleman, his eyes blazing with rage as he unleashes a storm of magic with a single barrier created by the extension of his index finger, speaks.

"Pilsi, you've got the right guest....... Apparently."

Antirrhinus looks at Lothar Dwin.

"Lukren, is that you?"

and Dwin grits his teeth.

"Yeah."

as Dwyn's eyes began to turn bright red.

"The boss is here in person, what happened to all those minions?"

"Don't pretend you don't know, Antirrhinus."

Dwyn's hair begins to spike in all directions as it begins to glow a reddish-orange color.

"You killed half of them and pretend you don't know it!"

"Uh huh, I didn't kill them all."

"Whoa....... Whoa....... Whoa!"

-Quadruple!

The storm raging through Lothar Dwyn's body was everywhere, cracking the earth and shattering the walls of the common room.

The Archduke and the Mages were holding the magic storm at bay with barriers.

The torrent that poured out of Dwyn's body as a

"Yeah."

Antirrhinus smiles at Lothar Dwin from a distance.

"I thought the rumors about Akrich might draw you in, but it didn't."

It retains its human form, but its grayish-white skin glows with a fiery red glow.

A pitch-black aura coursing through your body.

The Archduke watched Dwyne's form as a lothario with indescribable power.

There is no set form for something that exists only in legend.

But there's something powerful and unholy about that ominous presence.

-Oh, oh....... This, this....... Akrich?

Richie's stuttering mumblings, blown away by the magic storm.

"I didn't come to Akrich's grave, I was with him all along."

There's more to it than just a little bit of kink.

The hype around Akritsu brought out the real Akritsu.

Like a road vampire overcoming sunlight, Akrich overcomes his skeletal body.

"It was good of you to slaughter your comrades and flee in my absence. Antirrhinus. But in the immeasurable time since then, I have finally found you."

Just as there are vampires who overcome the sun, there are lich who overcome their lost bodies.

A being whose magic shapes the flesh that has already been lost.

"Now, it's time to pay the price."

Archrich reaches out to the old gentleman with a vast array of magical powers.

"Die, Antirrhinus. I will hear the story afterward."

Akrich, as impure magic should be called, slams his hand down from top to bottom.

-Kookaburra!

With that one gesture, immense pressure was exerted from top to bottom, cracking the earth.

"It's going to collapse."

After a long moment of silence, Luna spoke those words to the Archduke.

-deadduck

The Archduke watched as the ceiling of the chamber began to crack.

The Archduke stares at Luna.

Despite his feigned nonchalance to prevent confusion among his subordinates, the Archduke could not help but be appalled that the evil entity now the stuff of legend had been his companion all this time.

But Luna didn't panic, let alone act like she knew about it in the first place.

Is Akrich the problem.

The problem is not the people who take Akrich's attacks so casually.

Or is it this woman who, after seeing the spectacle, still has the same attitude as the first time.

The Archduke was unaware.

-deaddeaddead

However, the common ceiling was collapsing.

Episode 422.

As I made my way through the gate and later via mass teleportation to my destination, the vicinity of Richie's tomb, I could see a large area of fog.

We weren't rushing in, we were just taking stock of the situation.

The Quantum Maze is not an impenetrable labyrinth. The Imperial Wizards might be, but most adventurers would have no choice but to turn back.

There's no telling where the Vampire Council and my helpers may or may not arrive.

We didn't enter the labyrinth, but stood on the periphery waiting for the wizards to finish their analysis.

Saviolin Tana relayed the cautionary tale to me and Harriet.

"Once inside, I will move with you in the center. Don't do anything I don't tell you to do, and if we get into a combat situation, stay out of harm's way as much as possible. Anyone who can defend you will be more than capable of doing so."

"Yes."

"Yes."

Both Harriet and I nodded nervously. It was natural for her to be nervous, not knowing what was inside.

I don't know if there really is a Lothar Dwyn in there. Hopefully he is, and we can capture at least one key member of Cantus Magna.

"We'll enter as soon as we're done analyzing the labyrinth."

Now that we were together, Tana seemed intent on going all out.

That's why we waited outside long after we arrived for the wizards to analyze it.

Nothing happened for a while, but that's what made my blood run dry.

Late at night.

The analysis wasn't over until the deep white full moon rose.

With the moon overhead, Harriet and I could only stand by and watch.

I wondered if this is what it's like to have a sweet tooth.

It wasn't until the full moon was tipping over that the wizards responded.

-Situation!

One of the mages analyzing the labyrinth called out to Tana.

-The fog is lifting!

"What?"

The labyrinth analysis isn't over.

An anomaly has been detected in the Labyrinth Zone.

It was literal.

We were on one side of this mountain range, watching over a huge fog zone, so we could see most, if not all, of the vastness of the labyrinth.

However, the fog was gradually clearing.

You know as well as I do that that fog is already functioning as a quantum maze in its own right.

But the fog is lifting.

This means that the Labyrinth is being unlocked.

Why?

Has someone broken through the labyrinth?

Or did someone turn off Quantum Maze altogether?

The answer was time.

-ddddddddddddddddddd!

"Ge....... earthquake?"

The earth trembles.

A mountain range where the fog has quickly dissipated.

I hugged Harriet, whose face was beginning to turn white.

-Currrrrr!

"Earthquake! Protect yourselves! There could be a landslide!"

Tana's frantic cries roused everyone to action.

Trees fell with a thunderous crash. The mages around us worked their magic. Harriet and I squinted, watching the ground in the center of the labyrinth rise unnaturally.

Bulge.

For a moment, the earth rises like a rubber balloon.

-Purrrrrrrrrr!

A powerful blue flash erupted from the depths of the underground, exploding the earth.

A blast of magic sweeps the world in all directions.

-Kwagga-Kwagga-Kang!

The powerful barrier that the Archmages around me and Tana had put up shielded us from the powerful shockwave.

\* \* \*

The earth shudders.

I couldn't find a better way to say it.

After the ground around it exploded, the whole thing fell apart.

The ground nearby had given way and the ground was crumbling, turning the area into a giant ant-hole.

Luckily, everyone in the room was an Archmage, and they were able to keep themselves, as well as me and Harriet, safe from the blast.

The labyrinth is gone.

And the earth crumbled.

This means that those who wandered the labyrinth would have been blown to pieces in the explosion or buried in the vomit.

How many adventurers have sought treasure in that labyrinth? Hundreds? Thousands?

Unknown.

But there was no archmage to protect them, and they would have all died.

From our perch on the crumbling ground, we could see the center of the area, where even the fog had blown away.

It was so far away that Herriot wouldn't even be able to see it, and it would just look like a dot to me.

But one in-young is overcome by an ominous spirit.

-Bang! Kwah-rung! Quack!

It was clear that it was fighting something.

"All hands on deck, we're entering the field!"

Saviolin Tana exclaimed, gathering herself.

Whatever is going on over there, Saviolin Tana must take control of the scene. Herriot narrowed his eyes to see if she was using telescope magic.

"ah......."

Herriot's lip quivered as he pointed to the scene.

Harriet murmurs, dumbfounded, as if she's seen something she can't quite believe her eyes have seen.

"Dad......?"

"What?"

Herriot screamed, grabbing my arm.

"Oh, Daddy's there! Daddy's there!"

The Archduke of Saint-Thuan?

Why is the Archduke here?

No?

I felt my blood run cold, and of course I wasn't the only one who was stunned by the words.

"What do you mean, the Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan is in there?"

"Yes! I don't know why, I don't know why, but I have a dad!"

Her lips were blue, and she was shaking.

\* \* \*

-gooooooo

Akrich stood tall and glared at his surroundings as a powerful blast of magic blew the ground away.

The Labyrinth's original owner, Ritchie, was caught in the blast and disappeared.

Archduke Saint-Antoine and the Mages were unharmed.

Lucren, the Archon and head of Cantus Magna, turned his attention elsewhere before checking on Antrianus.

"Who the hell is she?

He didn't lift a finger during the explosion, not even a hair out of place.

He was still watching with a neutral expression on his face.

Who the heck is that.

Enemy or ally.

With no idea what she was, Lucren was most wary of this mysterious woman.

And in the moonlight, Lucren sensed that Antony's mood was slightly different.

A golden pupil with a vertical slit.

Pale skin and fangs protruding from between the lips.

The implications are clear.

"You've become a vampire, Antirrhinus."

"There are many ways to stand the test of time, you're a lich and I'm a vampire."

Both are the stuff of legend.

But it's bad.

Lukren looks up at the sky.

The time is night.

Vampires are creatures of the night.

"You should have organized your time better, Lucren."

The golden-eyed Antirrhinus raises both hands.

-Woody!

The Seven Families of the Great Lord Vampires.

Antirrhinus, lord of Saturday.

The earth rises, enveloping Akrich.

"Now, it's time to get to the truth of Akasha."

"What......?"

-Thump!

The mound of dirt that swallowed Lukren compacted and crystallized into rock in a matter of hours.

Antrianus smiled at the sight of Lucren, imprisoned in a prison of crystals.

"Ah."

Luna murmurs to herself.

"Is this a Saturday......."

The Archduke heard the low voice, but could not make out what it said.

"Maybe I'm not in the right place......."

Luna takes a step.

The next moment.

The Archduke watched as the woman suddenly disappeared.

Slowly, as before, I took a step.

But at that very moment, the Archduke saw the woman behind the old gentleman's back.

Whether it was magic or physical ability, the Archduke couldn't tell. With just one slow step, the woman caught up to the old gentleman.

"Is it you?"

Without turning around, the old gentleman opened his mouth with a faint smile.

"I'll ask."

Luna says still.

"Where are the archdemons?"

The question didn't faze Antirrhinus.

"How do you know such a story?"

"It doesn't matter."

As she took a step, she appeared in front of the old gentleman, not behind him.

The woman with her back to the moon asks Antirrhinus.

"Archdemon, where are you?"

Antony smiles at the question, his expression still calm.

"Hehe. I don't know which one you mean, but......."

The old vampire's eyes glint with amusement.

"An arm is something you bake inside......."

The old gentleman extends his hand to the woman.

"Who am I to speak of it to a stranger?"

-Whoosh!

Antirrhinus stretched out his hand and Luna disappeared like a mirage, only to reappear a few steps behind him.

"Also, you may be carefree, but I'm not."

-Twitter

A crack opened in the crystal prison behind Luna.

That wasn't all.

In the distance, Luna could see a group of mages and knights approaching.

"Hmm."

Literally, there was no time for idle chit-chat.

-Bam!

"Antirrhinus, you've become more of a trivializer."

After destroying the shattered crystal prison with his powers, Akrich spits out a hate-filled breath.

The fight between Akrich and the Lord Vampire.

Then an army of Swordmasters and Archmages approaches the scene.

Luna closed her eyes for a moment.

She took one step, and she was gone.

Antirrhinus looks at Akrich, who is roaring with rage, and smiles, not the fake smile he's used to, but a grotesquely twisted one.

"That's weird, Lucren."

Antirrhynchus watches as the imperial elite rush forward.

"Why did I come to this place alone?"

-pot!

One by one, the newcomers appear beside Antirrhinus.

Robed beings.

Support from the Black Order and the Vampire Council has arrived.

"Are you that confident?"

The imperial elite are coming.

It's going to be a mess, and someone is going to die.

The goal of the Vampire Council and the Black Order is to subdue Akrich and escape.

And the elite of the Empire were meant to be exterminated.

The Black Order and the Vampire Council.

Cantus Magna.

And the Imperial Elite.

The three-way battle was about to begin.

The leader of such an empire.

Saviolin Tana arrived on the scene of the confrontation.

"This is a pretty weird situation."

She stares at the group of robes and Akrich, and behind them, Archduke Saint-Thuan and the Mages.

"The Archduke is irrelevant.

Why he's here is unknown, but Tana figures it out as she watches the Archduke of Saint-Thuan pull back with his troops.

Superhuman, even beyond superhuman.

The world's strongest knight stares down at Akrich from his perch.

"Well, we'll just have to kill all the suspicious ones first."

Saviolin Tana points her Galeblade Tempesta at her enemies.

It doesn't matter to her how this happened.

You've come to destroy the enemies of the Empire, and you're here to do just that.

\* \* \*

The elite of the Empire were charging into the center of the storm.

The fight had grown to a huge scale. Antirrhinus and a large group of men in robes appeared.

It was clear that the Black Order members had been joined by the Lord Vampire's clan.

Lucinil and the other patriarchs would have been involved in the situation.

The target would be Lothar Dwyn, but eventually the clash with the Imperial Elite would begin. The Empire wouldn't know who the enemy was, and while we'd like to keep as many people as possible out of harm's way, that would be impossible.

Someone is going to die.

Me and Harriet stayed back and watched the spectacle. It wasn't our place to intervene.

In the middle of that fight is Herriot's father, the Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan.

Herriot does something in a situation he doesn't understand.

Then, in the distance, the Grand Duke of St. Thuan and his troops began to move toward us, away from the fighting.

While using short-range spatial movement in succession.

-Pow!

The Grand Duke of St. Thuan and his army approached, and the Grand Duke hauled Herriot roughly into his arms.

"Dad!"

-Wrong!

"Daughter, how did you get here......!"

He looked at me next to him and his eyes widened.

"Reinhardt, even you?"

I couldn't help but wonder if the Archduke of Saint-Thuan might be Cantus Magna.

-Kurrrrr! Kurrrr!

At the scene of the fight, where Antirrhinus was presumed to be, there was a fierce torrent of magic, lightning and thunder.

Add in Savior Tana's troops, and it was literally a whirlwind of a battle.

"Why is Daddy here? What is he doing here?"

Herriot said, trembling as he hugged the Archduke.

"Dangerous magic has been discovered, and I'm here to deal with it. But it seems there are more dangerous beings than I expected."

I don't know if what the Archduke said was true or not. But he seems to have changed his mind now that he's found Herriot here.

"I've got to get out of here, and we'll talk about this later."

"Yeah, yeah......."

As if to say, whatever I'm going to do, I'll do it after I make sure Herriot is safe, the Archduke released his embrace and looked around.

"Your Majesty, the mana flow is erratic. There are ultra-long-range spatial travel shields all over the place."

One of the Archduke's men reported that.

He had brought his elite forces here to capture Lothar Dwyn in the first place, so the Imperial Mages had analyzed the Labyrinth and even set up a spatial travel shield in this vast area.

It's not something that's easy to do, but the Imperial Mages can do the impossible.

"Then we'll use short-range spatial travel, daughter. Follow the troops. Reinhardt won't be able to use spatial travel, so I'll take him myself."

The idea seemed to be that the Archduke would send Herriot first and I would escort myself.

"No, we don't know what's going to happen. You go with Harriet, I'll catch up."

The Archduke seemed to be trying to protect me, but at this point, I was better off alone. I may need to contact Eleris and my forces in the coming days.

If the Empire succeeds in subduing Dwyn as a lothario, we may need to steal it.

"Is that okay?"

"Okay, go ahead."

The Archduke agreed to my suggestion, perhaps realizing that sending Herriot off on his own might cause problems, as well as my own safety.

"Reinhard....... Be careful......."

"Okay, you go first."

-nod

The group of mages, including Herriot and the Archduke, began to move away in short bursts of spatial travel.

I'll see what happens, but I'm not going to do that just yet.

I'm pretty sure that's Cantus Magna fighting over there. I wonder if the Archduke might not be in league with them, given that he abandoned that fight to come here.

Then why was the Archduke with that guy?

Is that really Lothar Dwin wreaking havoc over there?

What if the Empire kills him instead of subduing him?

That's when I turned to head up to higher ground to get a better view of the action.

For some time now, someone has been standing on the hill where the ground has collapsed.

"......."

A cold-faced woman stared down at me, her back to the moonlight.

The woman stood still, staring down at me.

I, for one, was not a stranger to her.

When Ellen grows up.

It was a woman who looked like a fantasy come true.

-Saman

She took a step, and she appeared in front of me as if she had leaped through space.

"!"

-char

A small pendant-like necklace, usually covered by a coppery case.

She took my necklace in her hand.

-Bam!

Then the case shattered, revealing the red jewel inside.

"Tuesday's Flame......."

She looks at me.

I recognized the flame as soon as I saw it.

"Where did you get this?"

The tone was friendly, but there was never a hint of favoritism in it.

"Nu, who....... Who, you."

She fixed her gaze on me, letting my necklace slip from her hand, and just stared at me.

"If you can't answer that, I'll have to ask you another question."

I felt a suffocating pressure, even though nothing was happening to me.

"Where are the archdemons?"

With that, she takes a step, a backward step.

-Kwachang!

And a blue magic spear appeared where she had been.

-pot!

And then someone else's new car arrived on my doorstep.

"Elise!"

"Get back, degradation!"

Eleris hadn't gotten into the fight, but had been scanning the area.

Elise, who had been watching the situation, intervened when she realized I was in danger.

The dark-haired woman looks at Eleris.

"You're here, Gajuiza, lord of the seven nights......."

"......."

"Ancient Archdemon."

The words seemed to stop me in my tracks.

"And, the boy who isn't a vampire, but has a flame of fire......."

She looks at me.

"A boy protected by an archdemon......."

I don't know what this person is talking about.

But the fact that I had a flame of fire seemed to draw a conclusion, as if it was already a given.

"Pilsi, you are the last Archdemon."

Neither Elise nor I knew who the woman in front of us was, but she instantly knew who we were as soon as she saw us.

"Who art thou?"

Elise looks at the woman, her expression filled with hostility.

I still don't even understand what she said when she looked at Eleris.

"Luna."

She takes a few steps back and stares at Eleris.

"日月當主, Luna artorius."

She held her right arm still.

At that moment, something unbelievable happened.

"It was originally the party's law not to interfere in the affairs of the people......."

As if the laws of the world had been reversed, the full moon behind her suddenly grew enormous.

The full moon, now ten or twenty times larger than usual, bathed the world in a chilling light.

I didn't understand a single thing that was going on.

"I don't want to lose a child twice."

She reaches out to the enlarged moon. There was something in her hand, as if swallowed by the moonlight.

In her hand, she held the Divine Waldo, which was shaped as if it held moonlight.

What is an ancient archdemon, and what does it mean to be a moonbat?

I don't know.

But the results are in front of you.

Ellen's mother is trying to kill me.

Episode 423.

-Kwachang!

Luna's Moonlight Godsword clashed with the blue magic sword summoned by Eleris.

"......!"

But the moonlit sword shattered Eleris's magic sword at the mere touch.

It was hard to accept that she was an Archdemon, but what I did see was that she excelled in melee combat as well as magic.

-Kaang! kang! Keying!

Eleris summons an enchanted sword to duel Ellen's mother.

It's no surprise that Elise is also quite skilled in close combat, but Ellen's mother surpasses even that.

That's not all.

The unusually large moon was not an illusion.

Was it even magic in the first place?

And Xinwaldo, who seemed to have been plucked from the enlarged moon, was shedding a faint glow of cool moonlight.

Most of all, the behavior of Ellen's mother, Luna Artorius, was bizarre.

It was hard to find a way to express it.

Luna Artorius was in human form, but she didn't move like a human.

"......."

She didn't make any of the usual swordplay moves like jumping, lunging, or slashing. Nor did all of her movements seem to have much force behind them.

But with each slow movement, Elise found herself unable to react.

If you attack, you will be hurting Ellen's mother.

But I didn't have to think about it. I knew best that it would be suicidal for me to get involved.

-Bang!

Eleris's summoned magic sword would shatter into pieces every time it met the Moonlight Frosted Sword, forcing Eleris to keep summoning her magic sword.

Elysse struggled to take the seemingly slow blow.

-Bang! Kaang! Kwachang!

For the umpteenth time, Eleris was only too eager to back down.

Eleris' melee prowess, and Luna Artorius' ability to easily surpass it, was a sight to behold.

Slowly but surely, Luna Artorius was attacking with a sense of urgency that seemed to transcend perception.

It's a lot to take in," says Elyse, looking like she's having a hard time keeping her distance.

"I don't know who you are, but....... We don't need to fight."

It was inevitable that Elise would know that Luna Artorius was Ellen's mother.

But Luna shook her head slowly.

"Archdemon. There is no one in the world who wants a fight."

"The last Demon War was not fueled by the desires of demons and humans, but by their mutual fear."

"All fights happen that way."

Luna Artorius, holding the Moonlight Godsword, walks slowly toward Eleris.

"Whatever you want to do is none of my business. It doesn't matter what the Ancestor Devil wanted or tried to do."

"I did not know, and do not know, whether the Ancestral Demon Valier was good or evil, nor do I care to know."

"However, the existence of the demon has caused a great war in the world, and that war culminated in the death of my son."

"Now also I do not know whether you are good or evil. You may be good, and the humans may be evil. Or maybe they're all good, or maybe they're all evil, or maybe my son's action in killing the demon was a consequential evil, but none of this matters."

"The point is, it's not lust and greed that call for a fight, it's fear."

"Just as the Darklands and humans' fear of each other conceived the Demon War and took my son."

"My current fear of the devil will conceive another fight, and this time it may take my daughter from me."

"I don't know what you want, and I don't know what you're trying to achieve by stacking these things. But even if I did, it wouldn't make any difference."

"You are already the very image and symbol of fear, and as long as it exists, you will provoke a fight by your very existence, and that fight will involve my daughter."

"Just as everyone's fight comes from fear, so does mine."

"I am afraid you will take my daughter away from me."

"So, I'm not killing you because of good or evil or righteousness or any of that nonsense. I'm killing you because my daughter is precious."

"It's an act from beyond good and evil, from simple fear."

"As a mother."

"I have one daughter left, and I want to protect her."

It doesn't matter if I'm Ellen's friend or whatever, it doesn't matter what I really want.

Ellen's mother wants to kill me because my mere existence is already the seed of a fight.

No amount of persuasion or sincerity will work.

Luna Artorius speaks, her back to the moonlight.

"So, die."

-shhhh!

Before she could take a step, she was already in front of Eleris, crossing space.

The movement was slow, but the speed through space itself gave Eleris no time to react.

-Bam!

"Hmph!"

After being struck in the chest by the Moonlight Godsword, Elyse bounced away and rolled several times across the floor.

"Hmph....... ugh......."

The barrier seemed to have somehow escaped her, but Eleris gasped several times as she clutched at her chest.

"Kwak! Kwak!"

Covering her mouth, Elise coughed up blood.

The sword didn't pierce him, but the impact alone seemed to break his body.

Once again, Luna Artorius takes a step forward.

If she crosses the space again.

Eleris dies.

Can I?

I?

Can I stop her?

A million thoughts jumbled and tangled in my head, but I acted faster than I thought.

-Bam!

In the next moment, I had already summoned Alsbringer and attacked before Luna Artorius could take a step.

She narrowed her brow at the sight of the sword in my hand, even as I lunged in with a tremendous amount of momentum, only to be deflected.

"......alsbringer?"

For the first time, a look appeared on her face.

Luna Artorius does not know me. But he may have heard of me from Ellen.

Ellen would have told her mother what kind of a guy I was.

You may have also heard that I am the owner of Tiamata.

And he knew that I was known to the world as the master of Alsbringer.

Luna Artorius's expression hardened as she pieced together the puzzle of her thoughts.

"Are you sure....... you're Reinhard......?"

It was clear that it would be impossible for a holy object to withstand the new moonlight, so I had no choice but to take it out.

It was never good for me for her to know I was Reinhardt.

"My daughter, is that what you've been playing with?"

Naturally, this is the reaction you're bound to get.

She's been moving slowly until now, and then her eyes light up and she bounces her knee off the ground toward me.

-shhhh!

"!"

-Bam!

"Eek......!"

A single blow.

I broke my wrist just enduring it, and the Alsbringer slipped out of my hand.

"Did you enjoy that, Archdemon?"

Luna Artorius's eyes lit up with life.

I've been playing with Ellen's mind, you can't help but think.

If Ellen realized that the Reinhardt of whom she spoke was actually the Devil, her thoughts could only boil down to this.

So Luna Artorius, who tried to kill me without emotion, was feeling anger.

The Alsbringer slips from my grasp and my chest heaves. Whether she plunges her sword in or twists my throat, the next moment I'm dead.

I die, and so does Elise.

He comes to capture Cantus Magna, only to be killed by Ellen's mother.

But I wonder if it was a good thing I provoked her anger.

-Bam!

"Cr......gh!"

She grabs me by the nape of the neck with her left hand and lifts me into the air. Her eyes bore into mine with fury.

The moonlight sword in her right hand flashed a dangerous light.

"Archdemon, why are you playing with my daughter's mind?"

She glared at me. If she tightened her grip, I would snap my neck. No enchantments, no words, no self-suggestions.

At least as good as, if not better than, Saviolin Tana.

This absolute could treat my life like a fly right now.

"Is this your revenge? What did you hope to gain by tormenting the mind of the brother of the man who killed your father? Is this your revenge, this lowly act?"

She can't help but think so.

The son of the devil meeting and getting close to the sister of a warrior is something that even she, as a novice, can't understand.

Luna Artorius, who seems to have lost her humanity, is trying to kill me because she can't let go of her parental humanity.

So now that I know the truth about my relationship with Ellen, which is bound to be very hurtful to her, I can't help but think, "I'm sorry.

That everything I do is for revenge.

"Did you take pleasure in imagining the hurt my daughter will feel when she learns of this later? Will you think you have won, even if you die here and now at my hands, because you can grieve my daughter with your death? Why on earth. Why not the Empire, why not the Imperium, why not humanity, why not my daughter....... Why to my daughter......!"

-cook

"Speak, Archdemon."

As the anger in her eyes grew, as if she was losing control of her emotions, so did the strength in her left hand, which was clasped around the nape of my neck.

Plural.

I'm not a vengeful person.

Actually, it can't be plural.

That's why there's as much wild suspicion as anger in Luna Artorius's eyes.

In the throes of breathlessness, the pain of being cut off.

I pulled my broken hand up close and grasped her hand, which was clasped around the nape of my neck.

"Then why not......?"

Why not?

This can't be revenge.

You don't understand my behavior either.

"Can I....... your daughter some....... If you like....... Can't......?"

"......what?"

Then what.

In the end, it was just for the love of it.

I mean, that's the only reason it's so slick.

Luna Artorius's grip on me weakened as I realized how surprised she was by my words.

I cry out, desperately tugging at her grasp.

"Yeah....... I'm the devil and I like your daughter, so what!"

"Uh....... Huh?"

Following the anger, I could see the bewilderment on Luna Artorius' face.

Episode 424.

To my astonishment, Luna Artorius, who had always seemed like a wall of steel and somehow inhuman, lost her grip on my throat in surprise.

-Hair

"Ewww....... chew......."

I gulped at the pain I felt as my wrist was smashed.

Eleris was still looking at me helplessly, unable to recover from the shock.

It's not a good situation to be in, and she's not the only one who's flustered by it.

Luna Artorius looks down at me from her perch.

"Are you lying to me to save your life at this moment?"

"If you want to believe it's a lie, believe it."

-sigh

I summon Tiamata and unleash my holy power.

Anger, the ingredient for using Tiamata.

Of course, there's no reason not to be angry when you're about to get your head blown off by Ellen's mom in the middle of nowhere.

Holy power heals my wrist.

I stagger to my feet and distance myself from her.

"If you want to kill me and be hated by my daughter for the rest of your life, go for it."

"......."

Luna Artorius stares at me in disbelief, as if it were a threat.

"Ellen won't know you're a demon."

"Yeah, I don't know. I don't want to know, and I can't accept it."

"Yeah, even if you really....... Even if you like my daughter, you two shouldn't be together......."

"Overly meddling in your child's life, that's not good."

What to say.

I don't think we're having this conversation.

I'm afraid for my life, and I'm afraid that I can't actually stand up to him.

I don't know, fuck it, I'll just say whatever comes to mind and fuck it, it's less frustrating.

"We do our own thing."

I aim my Tiamata at Luna Artorius.

"So you're out."

"Uh, ma'am?"

As a parent of a warrior, I wonder what it's like to be yelled at by a demon.

I'm not sure, but it was clear that I felt so stupid that I couldn't laugh or cry.

But for a moment, Luna Artorius's expression turned cold.

"Who's your mother. I never acknowledged you......."

"I have a case, and it's rude to call your crush's mother auntie. You don't know what's going to happen to her, and you can't call her mother-in-law, because you're not there yet. You're not there yet, so what's the point of calling her mom?"

"......."

Once again, Luna Artorius's expression becomes complicated.

I can feel her taking mental damage in real time, even though I can't do it with force or a knife.

What the fuck is this guy saying?

Why do I need to hear this from the devil?

I could almost see him thinking to himself.

How to do this.

Is it working?

Can you crush them and get them to back off?

"And I just heard for the first time today that Elyse over there is an ancient Archdemon or something, so I guess that makes her a distant ancestor of mine."

I have no idea what that means, but assuming it's true, Eleris would be my ancestor.

"Mother, what if I beat my in-laws like a dog?"

"Why the hell do I have to listen to this!"

"No, you're asking me why I did it, so I'm telling it like it is!"

"This, this....... This is ridiculous......!"

You're just like Ellen in that you can hold it in and then burst into flames.

"Mother, you said you weren't interested in the question of good and evil; you weren't interested in what I was trying to do or what I wanted."

"You're breaking the law and trying to kill me for thinking about my daughter."

"I like her. You're not going to believe this, but it's true."

"Choose, Mother. Kill me here and be hated by your daughter for the rest of your life."

"Maybe I'll just back off."

Luna Artorius was stunned as she realized that I was threatening her beyond the hierarchy of power.

If he wants to kill me, I can't stop him.

The bombardment of a distant battle was close, but if everyone in the room wanted to kill him, would it be possible?

I don't know.

Luna Artorius, however, regains her normal expression and stares at me.

You're probably thinking seriously about the fact that I like Ellen.

Beyond whether it's true or false, you'll be thinking about what you should do if it's true.

Eventually, she elongated the hand that held the sword.

There's a clear emotion in her eyes once again.

"Your heart is....... should rather be false."

"......."

"If what you say is true, I would rather....... I'd rather have my daughter die because of it....... I can see nothing but a more unhappy future for her....... Why would you....... my daughter....... Do you love....... There's no reason why you shouldn't......."

There was a deep sadness in her eyes.

"Would you rather die on this spot, leaving everything unfinished....... Wouldn't it be my duty as a mother to stop all this, before a small misfortune becomes a larger one, before my daughter is ruined....... before my daughter is ruined."

"I can't accept you either."

"There is no way my daughter, who has been deceived by you all these years, can accept you."

Heroes and demons.

The fact that I like Ellen is, in and of itself, bound to cause her and me later misery.

If me and Ellen have to fight each other later, it's bound to happen.

So Luna Artorius said, "If it's true that I like Ellen, then maybe that's why we should stop everything right there.

We didn't make that decision.

Ask me for input.

I could already feel it's mind trying to kill me.

Yes.

This is the yard that Ellen's mother knew.

Let's not postpone the tragedy any longer.

"I'll tell you what."

"......what?"

"I don't see the point in hiding it anymore when even your mother knows about it. Ellen will understand, I don't think so....... I know it's hard to accept, but......."

It's scary.

Since I've been deceiving her, I've been postponing the consequences forever, which get bigger the longer I put it off. Ellen will rightly feel betrayed, and she may not be able to accept me.

"You don't want to be killed by me, so you're willing to risk being killed by my daughter."

"Yeah."

Her expression hardened again at my words.

"I'm sure you're feeling cooler inside."

"......You, you weirdo."

Hearing her say that made me chuckle for some reason.

"I've heard that from Ellen a lot."

Weirdo.

That's what we've always heard.

She stares at me.

As if he could read the mind in my eyes.

"I love my daughter, but I don't know why I'm keeping you alive when it's clear that you're going to cause her untold misery....... I don't see why I should let you live."

But the moonlight sword in her hand was gone.

She seemed to read not my emotions but my ominous fate.

"But....... If killing you would make my daughter unhappy....... rather than suffer indelible scars at the hands of her parents....... It's better for her to make her own choice....... At least......."

She stilled and put her hand on my cheek.

"As it has always been, the affairs of the world are the affairs of the world, and the affairs of my daughter, who has gone out into the world, are the affairs of my daughter....... Should I be left alone......."

It was the hand of the man who tried to kill me a moment ago.

It was frighteningly warm.

After what seemed like forever, she removed her hand from my cheek and took a few steps back.

She reached up to the sky. The enlarged moon regained its original size.

What kind of power is that?

I didn't know, and it seemed like I would never know.

"Archdemon....... No, Reinhardt."

"It's ......."

She calls me by name.

"I know it's pointless, but......."

She stares at me.

"Don't make my daughter sad."

Luna Artorius, who sought to kill me not because I was a demon, but because I was a threat to her daughter, was ultimately unable to kill me because I was associated with her misery.

"I'll try."

"......I see you realize that's impossible."

I don't know if Ellen will accept my confession.

But I decided to go with it.

As she had done throughout the fight, she took a step forward without a word.

-sigh

And then, as she had done so many times before, she was gone, melted into the moonlight.

As if you were never here in the first place.

I felt like I was being led by a mirage.

Luna Artorius is gone.

Finally, I could turn my attention to what I really cared about.

"Elise!"

"......下载."

When she'd recovered enough, she pushed herself to her feet and leaned against me.

"I'm glad you're okay, but....... What the hell is going on here......."

"Sure......."

I didn't win a fight, I kicked out my mother-in-law who was going to kill me for saying I liked your daughter.

That level of ridiculousness was enough to make both Elise and I feel a little freaked out.

-Koo-koo-koo-koo!

In the distance, a battle raged.

There was so much fighting going on that you'd be forgiven for not noticing what was going on over there.

And again.

"Reinhardt!"

When I didn't follow, Herriot, who had returned, called out to me and was running with the Archduke in the distance.

"All of a sudden, the moon just got bigger and this....... Uh....... Who is that?"

Both Herriot and the Archduke looked at me and the Eleris I was supporting with a puzzled expression on their faces.

He says he'll follow me, but he doesn't come back for a while, so I realize I'm supporting the wrong person.

They don't know who Elise is.

I wondered if I should explain that I had found an injured person nearby.

-currrrrr

As the already dark night sky was engulfed in even more inky blackness, we couldn't help but look up.

"Is this....... What is it?"

Herriot mumbles with a dumbfounded look on his face.

A moment ago, the moon was dozens of times larger, casting its chilly lunar glow everywhere.

But this time, something else happened.

As if someone had deliberately distorted the middle of the night sky. No, not distorted, but as if someone had grabbed the night sky by the middle and ripped it apart.

Where the night sky had been torn apart, a gaping crack had opened up.

It was a bizarre sight, as if the glass pane of the night sky had shattered, revealing the abyss within.

The Archduke, myself, Elise, and Harriet could only stare in disbelief at the second sudden weather event.

The giant crack in the night sky was just the beginning.

Hundreds of beams of light shot down from the abyss.

We all knew it wasn't a blazing beam of light or a flash.

That's light from the depths of the abyss, burning as the falling body collides with the air.

The light of a shooting star.

"Meteor shower(流星雨)......?"

Not just one, but hundreds of meteors began raining down on the ground.

"The mythical magic of....... How......."

The Archduke mumbles to himself.

I didn't have time to think about whether this magic was real or not.

As if they're all going to die, there's only one who can use this kind of magic.

as Dwin.

It must be a spell he cast.

Episode 425.

"We have to run!"

Elise cried out as if she were having a seizure, and I, the Archduke, and Herriot came to our senses.

Yes, run.

If any of those meteors were seriously large, we'd have to worry about a planetary-scale catastrophe. But even if they weren't that big, it was clear that a catastrophe of epic proportions was going to sweep through the area.

If you were to flee, where would you go and how.

You can't use long-distance spatial travel because of the disruption, and even if you could, the casting time doesn't allow for it. Hundreds of fiery meteors raining down from the sky, scorching the earth, and how can you avoid them?

Can a barrier protect us from the shockwave of a meteorite fall?

Herriot gritted his teeth.

Like you don't know what to do or how to do it, but you need to do something.

Herriot's entire body begins to glow with blue energy.

Yes, casting magic as quickly as possible in a time-sensitive situation is something only Herriot could do.

But what can you do in this situation?

-Woof!

Herriot's amulet around her neck, as well as the numerous runes, was radiating a fierce light.

-chirp

Not one, but five power cartridges.

They were all radiating fierce magic, replenishing Herriot's energy.

Spatial travel is not possible? Can we use power cartridges if we have them? Are you trying to unbind us and use mass teleportation on the fly to move us to the outskirts?

-Woof!

I watched as the brightest of the hundreds of meteors suddenly disappeared.

I could clearly see a large circular crack in the meteor's fall trajectory.

Herriot opened a meteor-sized portal in the meteor's fall path, blowing it away.

A meteor has been extinguished.

"ugh......."

Herriot grits his teeth, breaks into a cold sweat, and casts his spell.

The largest meteor disappeared, followed by hundreds of other meteors, each one losing its light and disappearing.

Herriot creates a portal in the expanse.

Not by enduring the impact of a meteor, but by blowing it away somewhere.

One by one, then dozens by dozens, the meteors disappear without ever touching the ground.

The falling trajectories of hundreds of meteor bundles opened a portal there in the calculations.

The overwhelming magic of destruction, and the calculated genius of countering it.

I realized I was making too much fun of the greatest genius in the history of magic.

If we run away, everyone in this room is exposed to that meteor.

Someone will die, and some of them will be innocent.

Herriot was going to save everyone from disaster.

Mastery of dimensional statements through study.

Applying this, Herriot came up with the idea of erasing attacks instead of absorbing them, and was putting it into practice.

I, Elise, and the Archduke watched in disbelief as Herriot single-handedly erased the great scourge.

"ugh......."

However, Heriot's mana is not infinite.

Even with the help of the power cartridges, the portals to be opened were hundreds of units in size, and even with the falling meteors being blown away, even a genius's calculations had their limits.

-Thump! Koo-koo-koo!

Not only was a meteor or two falling to the ground that had escaped Herriot's calculations, but the power cartridges hanging from the necklace she wore were also losing their glow, one by one.

One by one, the far-field cartridges lose their light, just like a battery dying.

Realizing what was going on, the Archduke put a hand on Herriot's shoulder.

Mages can use siphon mana to replenish their mana. Just like Ellerys did in the Darklands when she replenished Ellen's depleted mana.

The Archduke shares his mana with his daughter, who is doing something outside of her limits.

Even that won't be easy.

You use your own mana, the mana in your power cartridges, and the mana of the Archduke, which is replenished in real time.

But Herriot is doing it.

Gritting her teeth, Herriot stares into the night sky and uses her replenished mana to open a portal to clear the meteor shower.

The scale of the task was so great that even with the support of the Archduke's mana, it would be limited.

"Send me....... to that child......."

Elise said it weakly, and without further ado, I scooped her up and walked over to Harriet's side.

Elise puts her hand on Herriot's shoulder and does the same thing as the Archduke. Herriot has no time to panic. Her head must be exploding from all she has to do right now.

-Woof!

Enveloped in blue light, Herriot begins to erase the meteor.

With the two archmages' powers replenished, Herriot began opening and closing dozens of portals in an instant. The meteors that poured from the rift were now dissipating without even touching the ground.

What a hellish amount of time has passed.

-currrrrr

When the cracks in the night sky disappeared like a lie, and the meteors that poured out of them were all gone.

"Ha, ha....... I did it, I did it....... I did it......."

"Long live my daughter."

A cold sweaty Herriot slumped to the ground, and the Archduke, similarly close to mana depletion, slumped to the ground, hugging Herriot.

With the exception of a few, none of the meteors hit the ground directly.

Eleris stared at the exhausted Herriot, wide-eyed, wondering if he couldn't understand what was going on, even with her help.

Herriot de Saint-Ouen, once obsessed with casting fireballs at orcs, has now saved us all from disaster.

I didn't save Herriot.

Herriot saved the day.

It was Herriot who fulfilled my wish that no one in the Empire, no one in my faction, die.

Huge moons appeared and disappeared, meteors rained down and disappeared.

Luna Artorius is back, but it doesn't make sense if the caster of this spell can continue the battle.

So, it seemed like the battle was just about over.

\* \* \*

The battle had virtually stopped when the skies opened up and meteors began to rain down.

When the mythical, godlike magic was cast, both the Council and the Black Order, as well as the Imperial Army, mounted massive defenses.

Everyone was nervous, darkened by the overwhelming, vast magic.

There was no way they could survive not one, but hundreds of meteors sweeping across the land.

However, the meteors were dispersed by a mysterious mage.

And the mage who cast a massive meteor summon with the intention of killing everyone in the room.

In return for casting such magic, Akrich was reduced to an empty shell, lying on the ground.

It was a spell cast by a man who had lived a long time and amassed a great deal of knowledge and magic, and who wished for the destruction of all things.

The power of Akriti to cast magic that no mere mortal, or even near-immortal, can cast is something that needs no introduction.

However, it was destroyed.

By the hands of a wizard not yet twenty years old.

"Hmph, hmph....... Heh, heh, heh......."

As such, Akrich lost all energy and could only let out a low, raspy laugh.

Sensing that the great upheaval was over, the Demonic and Imperial forces also lifted their barriers.

The two groups faced each other in the middle of the battlefield, with Akrich in the center.

They clashed because they couldn't tell Pia apart, but Saviolin Tana knows that Akrich was the key to this fight.

She was expecting to die, too, and her fright didn't quite calm her nerves.

From the murders in the palace, we knew something bad was going on, but everything Tana encountered here was new to her.

Akriti.

Vampire hordes.

The moon becoming bizarrely huge.

And meteors from a shattered night sky.

Even Tana, who had been through the whole prenatal process, was stunned by what was happening. How many times can one thing happen in a single night that will be the story of someone's life?

'It's too dangerous....... 'This place, it's too dangerous.

If all the troops in this position die, the empire loses more than half its power.

This meant that every single knight and mage in the Empire was a vital part of its power.

After summoning the meteor, Akrich was incapacitated, but a group of unidentified vampires remained.

Fortunately or unfortunately, the vampires and robes were prioritizing their attack on the Akrich, not the Imperials.

And because they were so skilled, there were no casualties other than minor injuries. It was intense, but everyone was fighting carefully.

Every knight or mage in the room knew that if they died or were injured, they were damaging the empire.

Saviolin Tana doesn't know how Akrich's meteor broke up.

However, this is not a response from the Empire.

If that's what they did.

Dealing with them is taking too much risk.

We couldn't afford to lose the Empire's greatest power for nothing in an unprepared fight against beings we didn't know.

"He's a traitor to the Empire and a priority criminal suspect. I will not pursue you if you leave quietly. Stand down."

However, the command is not a command.

Saviolin Tana was ordered to capture Dwyn as a lothario.

So we need to grab Dwin as .

"I'm not even going to ask who you are or what you do."

It was very possible that they were of the Devil's clan, but Saviolin Tana made as many concessions as she could. If they were demons, she couldn't figure out why they were after Akrich.

No, they were here because he came to them, and they were here.

Why?

Saviolin Tana didn't answer her questions, she only raised more questions.

Among the vampires, an elderly man in a suit stood at the front, cane in hand.

He was an old vampire, his bowler hat and collar untouched by dirt in the midst of a vicious and violent battle.

The old vampire stares at the fallen Akrich.

"Lukren."

He paid no attention to Saviolin Tana. The old man stared at the fallen Akrichman.

"Have you come all this way to show off your mastery of mythical magic?"

The old gentleman shakes his head.

"It's amazing magic, but it's been thwarted, and even if it hadn't been thwarted, why would you do something like this that would only result in you blowing up with us?"

Antirrhinus struggled, as if he didn't truly understand the situation.

"Antirrhinus......."

The fallen Akrich speaks in a cracked voice.

"Do you want to have Akasha......?"

At that, Antirrhinus smiled.

Episode 426.

"Oooh Lukren, have you finally found the heart to tell me what Akasha is?"

"Hehe....... Hmph....... Yes, Antirrhinus. You know nothing....... You know nothing......."

A low chuckle escapes Akrich, who has lost the ability to continue fighting. Akrich speaks from his fallen position.

"I will give you Akasha, Antirrhinus."

"......."

"Help me."

The smile on Antrian's face deepened at Akrich's words.

-Antirrhinus.

-You don't have other ideas, do you?

Saviolin Tana was listening to the conversation between them.

It was clear that something was being said, and it was something that only they knew.

You don't need to intervene first. Just listening to the story is informative.

She watched the spectacle as she ordered her allies to stand by with a call to arms.

There were so many unknowns.

But Akasha.

That hit Tana hard.

And there was a stirring on the vampire side.

To Tana, the man called Antrianus did not seem to have the trust of his allies. The old man's smile deepens, and the vampire slowly approaches Akrich.

"Lukren, what's my number?"

Antirrhinus squats in front of Akrich and whispers in his ear.

"I asked what the heck Akasha does, I didn't ask for it."

"......."

"Didn't you say that before? I never asked for Akasha. I asked what it did. No one could tell me, so I ended up buying it."

"......."

"Curiosity drives people crazy."

Akrich didn't have an answer for a long time.

"Akasha is....... that can make you a god."

"God?"

"Yes, god. With the Akasha, you can become a god. Antirrhinus, you and I will be gods."

At Akrich's words, Antirrhinus rose from his seat.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa....... Hoo-hoo. Shin. God....... Heh, heh, heh......."

An old man begins to laugh with his mouth covered, as if he were on the verge of mania. Everyone stares at the bizarre conversation.

"hhhhhhh......."

"Hmph......."

"......."

"......."

Tuk.

for example.

The old man stopped laughing and his expression turned grim.

"I didn't realize it was such a boring thing."

The old man's face was filled with disappointment, as if he was not at all interested in Akasha's identity.

However, a small smile soon appears on the disappointed old man's face.

"But boring things can also be fun things, depending on how you use them."

-Antirrhinus!

-Dude! What are you trying to do!

"Lukren, I'll take Akasha."

The vast expanse of teleportation shielding makes teleportation magic impossible. Nor can you easily outrun your pursuers.

Still, there are ways to beat them.

"You think you can get away with it, vampire."

Antony smiles at Saviolin Tana's words.

"Maybe I should have thought of a way to do that."

The old man stretches out his hand, and suddenly a huge sheet of parchment begins to glow.

"That sounds like something you spent a lot of time building."

As the scroll glows, the world begins to fog up.

It's not a magic trick, but if you have your scrolls pre-built, it's ready to go.

"This magic is......!"

Quantum maze.

Antirrhynchus had made this large-scale binding magic into a magic scroll.

It's as if they saw this coming.

There will be those who can crack the Quantum Maze, but it's certainly possible to bide your time.

And that was enough time to get away.

\* \* \*

Herriot was exhausted, and so was the Archduke, so they were in a serious state of disenchantment.

Eleris replenished them with siphoned mana, just as she had done for Ellen earlier. They were asleep, as if they had passed out.

As the magic dissipated, I could see the fog that had dissipated shortly afterward returning to the land.

The spell had been cast suddenly and on a small scale, so while the fog covered a large area, we were out of its reach.

In the first place, the fight was taking place at such a great distance that I couldn't even see what was going on, even with my eyesight enhanced.

But Elise's eyes widened, as if she'd seen what was happening on the ground.

"Antirrhinus has betrayed us."

"......Betrayal?"

"Yes, it looks like....... to join forces with Cantus Magna."

I didn't expect Antirrhinus to be a loyal ally forever.

I knew he was an unreliable ally, but I had to use what I could, and Antirrhinus was cooperating in earnest.

I did expect it to do something unexpected at a critical moment.

But that's now.

In the distance, Eleris and I watched as a swarm of black bats moved in the center of the fog, carrying something.

Antirrhinus, transformed into a swarm of bats, flies away with Akrich. It's too far away to intercept, so I and Eleris can only watch the spectacle.

Antirrhinus joined hands with Cantus Magna.

"Wherever they're going, we know where they're going to end up."

"......I see."

The wizards of Cantus Magna came here in search of the source of the spellbooks.

However, this is a fabricated source, and the actual spellbooks are found elsewhere.

And now that Antirrhinus has decided to join forces with Akrich, it's clear where they're headed.

You will try to find the true source of the grimoire and complete the Akasha.

"Let's go to the basement of the Demon Castle. We'll either take the grimoire or burn it before they get there."

"I guess so."

The basement of the Demon Castle is clearly of value to them. They may have come here in the first place thinking it was the source of the Grimoire, and its capture would mean the completion of Akasha and irreparable disaster.

If I fail to stop Antirrhinus and Akrich, I will be the cause of any problems that arise when Akasha is completed.

We can no longer operate out of context.

I look at the fallen Heriot.

"Line....... Hart......."

Faintly opening her eyes, Harriet looks up at me from where she lies.

I wondered if I'd passed out, if I'd regained consciousness. No, I felt like I was still half-conscious.

Herriot looked like he was dreaming.

I crouched down in front of the fallen Herriot and gently picked him up.

The betrayal of Antirrhinus. I wonder where this is going.

Shouldn't I have borrowed his hand?

I don't know.

I don't know anything.

Being judged on intent is ugly.

"Pfft."

"......Yes."

"No matter what happens in the future....... just remember this one thing......."

Herriot hugs the nape of my neck with difficulty.

"I wanted to save everyone......."

You should be judged by your results.

Wanting to be judged on my intentions, my heart, my will is just defeatism.

It's just an excuse for me when I don't get it right.

Still.

At least.

I wanted to do well.

I wanted to save everyone.

I wanted someone, at least one person, to recognize that.

"Yes......."

Herriot, who seems to be half asleep, strokes my hair, gently.

"Believe......."

With those words, I felt something hot rise up in my chest.

With those last words, Harriet closed her eyes, falling asleep.

I felt bad leaving it like this, but I didn't have time to wait any longer.

And with the mages of the Duchy of St. Thuan on their way, the Archduke and Herriot would be safe.

Eleris seemed to have recovered somewhat.

"Let's go, Elise."

"Yes, degradation."

Those trapped in the Quantum Maze don't know when they'll get out.

The two of us might be able to hold off Antirrhinus and Akrich, but it was only me and Eleris who could make a move right now.

\* \* \*

It was only a single hit, but she had been beaten by Luna Artorius, and she had shared her power with Herriot, who was wielding a massive amount of magic, so Eleris was exhausted.

Eleris and I are out of the area of the spatial travel disruption force field.

It would have been better to enlist the help of Lucinil or the Black Order to escape from the Quantum Maze, but Antrianus and Akrich might be heading straight for the Demon Castle Underground, so we had no choice but to move quickly.

-Pow!

"Ha ha....... Ha ha......."

"Are you okay?"

"Yes, degraded....... exhausted for a while......."

I walked alongside Eleris, who was struggling just to use the mass teleport.

The good news is that the entire garrison of Demon City has been evacuated.

We made it to the ruins of the castle and didn't run into any Imperial troops.

As we enter the chilly, secluded grounds of the demon castle, I keep walking, supporting Eleris.

Ancient Archdemon.

What the heck did that mean?

And why did Ellen's mother know about it?

"Sorry for hiding it, Degradation......."

Even though she hadn't said anything, Eleris was the first to speak.

"I don't know the details, but....... I think I know now why, despite your aversion to fighting, you were the only one of the Council's houses to decide to help Darklands."

"......."

The members of the Vampire Council must have known that Elise was originally an Archdemon. They didn't seem to have any doubts about her helping Darkland.

Eleris walks, leaning on me, and speaks in a weak voice.

"I am an ancient, now-forgotten demon from a niche in the long history of the Darklands."

Ancient Archdemon.

Eleris is immeasurably old, and therefore an ancient ancestor of the Valyri.

"It's not a very valuable or interesting story, but......."

Elise says in a wistful voice.

"I wished for the destruction of the human race."

"Luna Artorius....... She said that fighting is born of fear."

"I sought to exterminate the humans because I was afraid of them, afraid that they would one day focus their combined power on the Darklands. While their nations fought amongst themselves, I, as the Demon King, could unite the power of the Darklands. It was my duty as the Demon King to exterminate the divided humans before they could form the empire that is now....... It is my responsibility as a Demon King."

"So....... I made Darklands a living hell."

He sounded self-deprecating.

What did Eleris do when she was a demon?

"We crossbred to create powerful beasts, dabbled in a lot of judicial and black magic to create powerful homunculi and chimeras, and used demons to create weapons of war."

"Countless demons were subjected to harsh training because of my judgment, and I turned a blind eye to countless lesser demons dying in slavery and starvation in the name of stockpiling war supplies."

"I was the worst demon who sacrificed the most demons, wishing for the destruction of mankind and creating a world for demons."

"The dominance of the Archdemon is both unifying and terrifying, as is the very existence of demons."

"Through it all, I didn't see the demons express the slightest bit of dissatisfaction."

"They all loved me, followed me, and never questioned my will in the slightest."

"In the Darklands, the presence of demons is absolute; if a human king did such a thing, there would soon be a rebellion, but none of the demons had the will to resist the absurdities and outrages, including mine."

"They obeyed me because they loved me, and they were dying because they loved me, cursing and blaming themselves for not being strong enough, for not being born strong enough."

"I mean, I didn't think it was weird."

"I thought it was all a sacrifice that had to be made for the lasting peace of the demons."

Countless demons have been sacrificed for the cause of lasting peace.

One day, not long after I met Elise, she said something like that.

It was about the time I got on the horsepower train.

What if we hadn't been so obsessed with powerful weapons and magic, and had instead tried to make something like this?

I once said something like that.

I wonder if he was blaming himself for that, not Valier.

Eleris prepared for war.

None of the demons resisted the Archdemon.

In their blind loyalty to the Archdemon, they believed its commands to be the truth.

Archdemons are the gods of the demons themselves. Loved by all and never allowed to be questioned.

"So, you went to war?"

"......No. There's a rebellion."

"......How the hell does a rebellion happen?"

Perhaps the Archdemon's rampage has reached its peak and a demon has awakened, perhaps a fringe demon has broken free of the Archdemon's grip, perhaps the Vampire Council has invaded. No, wasn't that a rebellion?

At my words, Eleris looks at me with a forced smile.

"Aren't there demons that Archdemons can't control?"

"Oh....... No way."

"An archdemon cannot dominate an archdemon."

Elise's gaze flickers downward.

"I was overpowered and horned by my son, who could not withstand my ravings."

A son's rebellion against his mother's tyranny.

The only demon that can stand up to an Archdemon.

That would only be possible for someone of the same lineage.

Episode 427.

One day, my son would inherit my mission and complete the destruction of the human race if I failed to fulfill it. The feeling of despair and betrayal as he struck me in the back and snapped my fallen horns was indescribable.

Still unable to kill the mother, the son snapped my horns and chased me out of the Darklands.

With his horns cut off, the demon lost all power; he could no longer control the demons, nor could they follow him.

It wasn't until later that I realized that casting me out of the Darklands was a final act of kindness from my son to his mother, for if I had remained in the Darklands, the demons that had escaped my control would have tried to kill me.

You're a dead man walking, unable to use any of your powers, magic, or knowledge.

The pain of having my horns snapped off by a demon was worse than death, and for a long time I suffered from the pain I felt in the place of my missing horns.

Would I have come to my senses and realized my mistake.......

I was just angry and frustrated.

It was sad.

I shook with rage at the thought of losing everything I'd worked so hard for, of being just a little further, just a few steps away, only to have it all ruined at the last minute, even at the hands of my son.

I couldn't die like that.

So frustrating.

I'm so excited.

It's so unfair.

I didn't want to admit that it was all over.

He didn't know how, but he wanted revenge on the son who had brought such shame to his mother, and he wanted to fulfill his mission by reclaiming his throne.

I was looking for a way for a horned demon to build up its power.

I realized that I needed to become immortal, so I became a vampire. By becoming a vampire, I sought to become strong again by accumulating the power of other beings within myself.

He traveled between the Darklands and the lands of men, seeking the blood of the strongest demons, the strongest beasts, and the strongest humans, sometimes fighting to the death.

Rumor has it that there are those who have attained the pinnacle of vampiric power in a secluded place in the far, far north, and so the Vampire Lords sought them out, seized the power of the Lord Vampire, and thus became the Clan of Hwayo.

Since then, I have drunk the blood of countless beings.

Eat, eat, eat, eat.

I've been feeding for so long that I believe the bodies of countless beings I've piled up form mountain peaks, and the blood I've sucked flows like a river.

At some point, I had no choice but to become the Gazoo of Tuesdays.

My ancestor, Gaju, who was so sick of living that he took his own life, handed over the position of Gaju to me and said.

Isn't it time to stop killing for the sake of killing?

I could drink all the blood in the world and my thirst would not be quenched.

Ask yourself if you really want what you want," he said, and closed his eyes.

I hadn't really thought about it.

For a very long time. I realized that I hadn't thought about it.

At some point, I became an otherness, killing to kill, drinking to drink, getting stronger to get stronger.

They wander the world in search of stronger blood, but the original vengeance and purpose they sought to fulfill through it has been lost in the mists of time.

Not quite there yet.

Still, it's not enough to take on the devil.

You're still a long way from reclaiming your throne.

As I piled on the kills to get stronger and stronger, I realized that the throne of Darkland had already changed hands.

I knew then that the son who had broken my horns and driven me away had long since outlived his usefulness, and that his daughter was the next demon.

Before I knew it, I was an aimless vampire, an immortal dead man wandering the continents in search of blood.

Why the throne of the demons must be mine again.

Why the human race must end.

Why I was hoping for that.

It's all been lost in the shuffle.

In my obsession with strength, I had become a crazed vampire with nothing left but a bloodlust.

I realized too late that my vague sense of revenge and lust for the throne was long gone.

The power from the mountains of corpses and rivers of blood was in me, but I realized too late that there was nothing I wanted to do with it.

Lowly, many a tyrant has victimized his people with his misguided actions, but that doesn't mean I'm going to kill him.

As a tyrant, I sacrificed countless demons, and as a vampire, I built another mountain of corpses with my own hands.

I don't think there's anyone in the world who has done more killing than me.

It wasn't atonement, but it had lost its meaning, and I no longer engaged in the killing.

After wandering the world in search of blood, I wandered the world once again in search of nothingness.

I had lost my purpose and had no wind, so I moved through the world like a disoriented wind, blowing wherever my feet took me.

Sometimes in the Darklands, sometimes in the land of men.

Despite the fact that they had been around for a very long time, this was the first time I had seen them in action.

To me, demons were tools and humans were enemies.

To me, as a vampire, all beings were just ingredients for strength.

It was only after I lost all cravings that I was able to look at the beings in the world without a purpose.

The way humans live.

Demons in action.

I watched them for no purpose or reason, just because they were there.

Despite having traveled across countless lands and drunk the blood of countless beings, it was as if I was seeing countless sights for the first time.

One day we rode over mountain ranges, one day we walked through snowfields, one day we traveled through deserts, straits, and jungles, and we saw so many ways of being and so many modes of existence.

It's about seeing those lives where everyone seems to be the same and living differently.

I couldn't help but realize how much I had sinned and how many lives I had destroyed.

It has shattered and destroyed immeasurable lives and foundations as it grinds what could have been more beautiful, everything that is enough as it is, into a sack of unfulfilled longing.

I'm guilty of learning too late how to love something.

It's an ugly, cowardly vampire who only realizes that something was worth loving and caring for after it's gone.

So that's what I thought.

The mountain of sins is too great, and the day will never come when it will be covered with goodness.

At least.......

Let's not pile on the sins.

It was still a vague life.

He doesn't suck blood anymore, just wanders the world vaguely, observing things, trying to help someone when he can, but being careful not to be too presumptuous.

There's no such thing as deserving to be good.

The best I could do was to give someone a very small, hard to call it good, amount of sympathy.

It was a period of apathy and contemplation.

One day, in the midst of those long, long, long, long days of still being vaguely aware, I heard it.

War between the Darklands and humanity is at hand.

I felt confused for the first time in a long time.

I didn't think there was a role for me, a forgotten demon, an old vampire, to play in a war that was sure to leave many dead.

However.

There was a certain sense of obligation.

A demon who once blighted the Darklands with his tyranny.

A man-hating demon who wanted the end of humanity.

It's a very old root, but as an archetype.

I felt a certain obligation to watch that war, even if I couldn't play a big role in it.

It's not like there wasn't a bond to the blood of the Archdemon that would have been diluted and lost.

I felt it was my duty to at least hold the hand of a distant descendant, even if I couldn't help them as much as I could.

So I sought out Valier and got under his wing.

I wanted the war to end without too much blood being spilled. I thought that no matter who wins, there will be blood, and the only good in war is that it ends quickly.

As I thought, I was in an unremarkable role, far removed from the war and watching it unfold from afar.

And....... Toward the end of the war.

A day when the war had already ended in a faraway land.

A boy walked through the door of my store.

When I realized the boy was a degradation.

I'm.......

I knew in my gut that I had a certain destiny.

\* \* \*

When she's finished, she looks at me.

In a place where a demon would never appear, Eleris faced me.

What was going through Elise's mind in that moment?

When the fallen Demon King of the Darklands, unwilling to take on any role, was swept into the arms of his most distant and final descendant.

Eleris must have felt a certain intense sense of destiny that she could not remain a bystander on the outskirts of events.

"The rest of the story is....... as you know."

Eleris is an ancient, long-forgotten demon.

Ancient Valyri might have known that Eleris was a Lord Vampire, but not that she was an ancient demon.

Up until this point, all of Eleris' actions made sense.

I wondered if the motherly attitude and the way she treated me was actually coming from her heart.

Ancient Bali would have already had an absolute position as a demon king.

But I'm clumsy, I've lost my memory, and I don't have any real powers, so she's going to be worried about what I do, and I'm going to be worried about getting hurt or killed.

It's unlikely that Elyse, a tyrant, would have been a good parent.

So maybe he was trying to give me some kind of affection that he didn't have for his own children at the time.

When I was wondering who Eleris was, I thought maybe she looked like my mother, and it turns out she did.

Archdemon turned vampire.

That was her true self.

They may have lost all of their powers, but they are still Archdemons at heart.

Therefore, he stood by the side of the Demon King to see the end of the Archdemon's world, or at least its victory.

"I've been wondering about this for a while."

"Yes, degradation."

I wonder if I should call her something else now that I know she's my ancestor, but she still calls me Jaehae, so I don't think I need to clean up the nomenclature.

"Doesn't that mean she had a husband?"

"Ah."

I've been wondering about this for a while now.

"If there are so few Archdemons, how is the maintenance of the species going to work?"

At the moment, I'm the only pure-blooded Archdemon in the game, although I'd include Elise and Charlotte in that broad category.

Was Eleris married to another Archdemon?

Did the numbers just go down and down and down and down?

Elise stares at me as if I've asked her a question.

"Archdemons are all races and their....... um......."

"I get what you're saying, no more."

"Yes....... Of course, we don't really have any information about where it is possible....... universally....... and archedemons are very difficult to see their descendants......."

I could tell by the look on Elise's face that she knew what I meant.

The archetype is a .

The one that does everything.

Uh.......

I guess so.

I don't know why, but.......

It's not even clear where to start.

It's too scary.

I'm just scared!

I'd rather not even know who Elise's husband was!

I guess that's why Elise and the others haven't said anything about my crush until now.......

"And so, with each generation, the blood of the Archdemon grows thinner and thinner."

I finally understand why my Demon Domination ability is so terrible.

We walk down into the basement of the demon castle.

"When I heard that the Lord was trying to prevent a great tragedy from happening in the future....... I wondered, presumptuously, if atonement was possible."

I told all my secrets only to Elise.

That the Gate is going to happen in the future, that it's going to be a great tragedy for all beings in the world, and that you want to stop it.

That's why I've been working on finding Akasha.

"Of course, nothing can remove the mountain of sin I've built, but....... But if I could, if I could do something to help prevent future tragedies. I wondered if I could lighten the weight of the killing and sin that I've accumulated, just a little bit, just a little bit....... I dared to think that......."

Eleris wants atonement, but she knows it's a luxury and an ugly thing to ask for.

Nevertheless, Eleris is willing to cooperate with him if it means that helping me will absolve her of some of her sins.

In a war, you'd be afraid to take anyone's side, but this is about saving everyone.

So she hopes I'm sincere, and she's helping me.

"Degraded......."

"Uh."

"Regardless of how this turns out, I consider myself fortunate to have met you, and I believe it's my good fortune, and your good fortune, that you wandered through a zodiac full of humans and found me....... That's what I believe."

May it be our mutual good fortune that we met.

At her words, which I believe and hope are true, I continue down the stairs, supporting her.

"Maybe it's not luck that we met."

"......."

I put a little more strength into the arm that supports Elyse.

It all started when Elise and I bumped into each other at a shop in the ecliptic.

If I hadn't met Eleris, I might have wandered the streets of the ecliptic and lived as a beggar, or been found out and hung for being a demon.

If I hadn't met Eleris, I would never have entered the Temple, and none of this would have even begun.

I wonder if me and Eleris could be lucky enough to meet.

I wonder if I'll be remembered that way.

I don't know.

Nevertheless.

"I'm confident that even if it wasn't luck, I wouldn't regret it."

I don't regret any of this.

"......."

At my words, tears formed in the corners of Eleris's eyes.

\* \* \*

We soon arrived at the underground bunker of the Demon Castle.

It was clear that we had arrived ahead of Antirrhinus and Akrich.

Eleris was now recovered enough to see how far she had come.

"If breaking through the Quantum Maze is the same as getting here, can they break through the Labyrinth and get here?"

"I'm not sure about that."

I'm not sure if only archedemons can get there.

The important thing is that after me and Charlotte, Elise can enter this place. Charlotte, with her half-soul, can come here, so it's clear that Archdemons who have been turned into vampires can also enter this place.

Eleris and I headed to the library.

As Dwyn, he coveted the spellbook that Charlotte had smuggled out of the city, so he went on a murderous rampage through the palace and made his way to Ritchie's tomb.

So now that Antirrhinus had betrayed him, he would soon find a way to get there.

You must retrieve or burn the spellbook before doing so.

"But it's a little....... to burn. ......."

"I'm afraid I can't retrieve it, as I'm a mage myself....... We don't know what will happen to it when Akasha is finished, so we'll have to wait until then......."

Eleris and I stood in front of the library and sighed.

"Maybe we should burn the magic Akrich used, because it's dangerous to have it here."

"When you think about it, yes......."

I knew magic was powerful, but just thinking about what would have happened if that meteor had struck the earth was mind-boggling.

Of course, it's even more ridiculous that Herriot stopped it.

Magic is dangerous in its own right, and that level of magic is better left out of the world.

Such a spellbook might be lying dormant in this library somewhere, and it might be better to burn it than to secure it.

I stared at the library for a while, and a title caught my eye.

[Understanding the operation structure of meteor clusters through astronomical observations and the opening of portals through orbital calculations].

It was an incredibly thick book with a pretty long title.

What it is.

This.

I'm not sure, but is it just me or does this feel a bit like that magic?

I pulled out the chunky book.

"Lower, here......."

Elise had found something, too, and pulled a book from somewhere.

That's what it said in the book Elise was holding.

[Understanding the operation structure of meteor clusters through astronomical observations and the opening of portals through orbital calculations].

Elyse was staring blankly at the grimoire I was holding.

"I think it's the same book, but......."

"......Yes."

We picked up the exact same book from completely different bookshelves.

A strange chill ran down my spine.

Charlotte had recently removed many of the spellbooks from here, and she had seen the stacks of books in Lothar Dwyn's house.

I saw the magnitude of the problem clearly.

So, a bookshelf or two here should be empty.

"Why....... bookshelves are all......."

But.

Every bookshelf in my line of sight was filled to the brim, with no room for anything else.

\* \* \*

My mind raced with all the experiences I'd had.

The same book in my and Eleris' hands. It's probably a spellbook for summoning meteors.

When I first discovered this bunker with Charlotte and Tana. I wanted to see if there was any magic in this library that could improve Charlotte's condition. For example, if there was any magic that dealt with spirits.

I was able to find a book on seduction right away.

The second time I came here with Elise and Lucinil, I looked to see if there were any other copies of The Art of Marriage to show Lucinil.

I went straight for the demonic language version of the art of engagement.

Eleris quickly found the spellbook that designed the labyrinth, the Quantum Maze, and said it must be here.

And now.

I tried to find out if there was a similar spellbook for summoning meteors, and I quickly found it.

This book is about.

Strangely, there's a lot of magic.

Oddly enough.

If.

No way.

I.

Have I been mistaken all this time?

Elise and I stared at each other in disbelief.

I turn my attention to one of the bookshelves in the library.

Is there some kind of magic book on fireballs?

As I turned my gaze elsewhere, I noticed a book tucked in there.

[Understanding and Applying Fire System Basic Destruction Magic - Fireball].

There was a spellbook for fireballs, though it was relatively thin compared to other spellbooks.

"The books on this shelf, they're changing in real time."

"Yes....... Obviously......."

When I go to look for a spellbook, it's on the shelf at some point.

So I didn't waste any time finding it.

Both Elise and I are getting a little white in the face.

I've never wanted more.

It would be in the hands of others.

That's what I thought, so I didn't ask. I didn't think there would be any information about it here.

But.

Now I want to know.

No, this bookshelf will tell you.

What is Akasha? Is there a magic book that explains Akasha?

Look away once more.

But none of the books jumped out at me.

Is there any documentation on what Akasha is?

No, the keyword is wrong?

Could there be other books, not just spellbooks?

Because anything else is good.

Something written about Akasha, something that doesn't have to be a book about magic.

Is there?

When I turned my attention back to the book, it caught my eye.

A red leather-bound notebook-like thing caught my eye.

I pulled out a book, but it didn't have a title.

I opened the book.

When I saw the first page, I couldn't help but gasp.

[My son, never, never use akasha for destruction].

That one sentence.

Instead of a bunch of complicated theories and explanations, that sentence explained everything to me.

"Elise......."

"Yes....... Degraded."

I was looking for Akasha, not realizing that she was already in my grasp.

Akasha is an artifact.

And I was assuming that artifacts would be things.

Not a thing.

"Maybe....... This bookcase here, no....... not just the bookshelf, but......."

I look around the library.

"This space....... itself....... that is Akasha....... like......."

Akasha was a space.

Episode 428.

All my efforts to find Akasha were in vain, because it was already in my grasp.

It all made sense to me.

Why there was only one wizard in Cantus Magna.

What the hell did the surviving Valier do in the original?

[Son].

[There is a certain amount of logic to all magic. A fireball has a reason for creating flames. Thunderbolts generate electrical discharges. The study of homunculi has the power to create life, and so does magic that manipulates cold and heat, magic that summons water, and magic that makes trees grow].

[All magic in the world contains, to a greater or lesser extent, a methodology for manipulating the world with mana].

[If we succeed in bringing together enough of the world's reasoning that we don't need that thing anymore, if we have the tools to do so].

[It would be possible to create a world through it].

[A tool of creation to extract reason and logic from magic to the point where the world could be constructed].

[Akasha is such a thing].

[The origin of Akasha is unknown. It may have been a shell created by the Five Gods for creation and abandoned somewhere, picked up and used by the wizards of Cantus Magna, or it may have been an artifact that the founding fathers of Cantus Magna created in hopes of completion and continued to perfect in later generations].

[Of course, if they hadn't foolishly tried to kill me and covet my magic, I would never have learned of Akasha].

[The process of capturing Akasha while pulling the wool over their eyes was complicated, but in the end I succeeded, and now I can dream of a different vision].

[not the peace attained by the destruction of mankind, but the attainment of paradise through creation].

[But nothing is certain at this point, as we don't know how this war will end].

[Son, if you're watching this, it means I'm not already in the world].

[As your father, I know your temperament best and have arranged for it, but I do not know if it will work].

[My son, only I and the Four Heavenly Kings, including you, know of Akasha's whereabouts and our true purpose. Don't you dare run your mouth about Akasha. Cantus Magna has self-destructed since Akasha's disappearance, but remnants may still be searching for her].

[Also, if humans were to learn of Akasha's whereabouts, they would naturally covet it. They will not believe us when we tell them what we intend to do with Akasha. The fact that we are at war with each other because we want peace is proof that there can be no trust between us].

[If I die and the Darklands are destroyed, you will not seek revenge through Akasha, but will walk the path of completing Akasha. Humans have always been our greatest, most dangerous, and powerful enemies, and the path of destroying them will be more difficult than leading our surviving compatriots through creation to paradise].

[Akasha is nearing completion].

[We have always fought wars for survival; there is no reason why we should wish for war and destruction when we have other alternatives].

[I am uneasy about leaving Akasha in your hands, but if I were dead, you would be the only Archdemon. You would be the only one who could lead our lost kin].

[Remember, running an unfinished Akasha will spell doom].

[Never be driven by petty vengeance].

[My son, I beg you].

[Complete Akasha].

With that, I closed the notebook on the last of the Squadron Valier's words.

Elise froze, as if she had seen it too, and doubted her own eyes.

"The Ancestral Demon King....... did not want war......."

Memories of a lost Bali.

It already had the answers and clues to everything.

That's how I got to Akasha after traveling all these miles.

The Akasha is itself a tool for recording the reason of the world, and when all reason is recorded, it is an object that can be used to create a world.

There were no portals to other worlds.

This world is made up.

Through a creation tool called Akasha.

It's also clear what Valier did after surviving the Demon War and fleeing to this bunker.

There's no way that Valier Jr. could have completed Akasha without being a cripple.

No vengeance and anger would have given him the strength and base he needed.

Valier Jr. may have been contemplating how to complete Akasha in this basement with a vengeance, only to realize that it was impossible for him to do so.

And.

Vaguely vengeful and fed up with his own incompetence, he activated the incomplete Akasha out of desperation.

A flimsy world that hasn't been built properly, and the monsters that are created by the unfinished laws of that flimsy world.

That would be the gate situation.

[Event Complete - Homicide Tracking].

[Earned 5,000 achievement points].

[Additional Reward - 10,000 Achievement Points].

[Challenge Complete - Identify Akasha].

[50,000 achievement points].

I finally understood why the challenge was called "Identify Akasha" and not "Find Akasha".

We had already found Akasha, we just had to figure out what it was.

[Challenge Complete - Find Cantus Magna].

[Earned 30,000 achievement points].

Cantus Magna has already destroyed itself. Unaware that the Demon Valier had seized Cantus Magna, it was torn apart from within as it searched for the whereabouts of the missing Akasha.

Infiltrating the Imperial Ministry of Magic, Lothar Dwin was a remnant of the defunct Cantus Magna.

There can only be one reason for his sudden murderous rampage and visit to Richie's grave.

Among the spellbooks Charlotte brought to the Imperial Ministry of Magic, there must have been magic that only existed in Akasha.

Your eyes should have flipped.

Magic has been discovered that only exists in the lost world of Akasha.

So after killing wizards and torturing them to find out where it came from, we couldn't figure it out, so we headed to the most likely place: Richie's tomb.

It's not just about getting a grimoire and putting it in Akasha.

He's here to retrieve his lost Akasha.

The achievement score quickly surpassed 100,000 points. And then it all came to an end.

The answer to everything, in the end, was too easy.

"If I don't do anything....... if I do nothing......."

Cantus Magna is long gone, and Akasha's owner has been Darkland for some time.

The trigger for the gate was Bali.

So, if I don't do anything, that alone won't cause a gate event.

Elise gently pulled me into her arms.

"Degrading....... Still, it's nice to know the truth......."

"Yeah, I guess so."

You just need to stop everything now before it happens.

If you do nothing, that's good enough.

I didn't find out until it was too late, and for that alone, I'm grateful.

I grabbed Eleris's arm.

Yes.

We've come to the end of the line.

If you don't want anything to happen, just live like you are now. No plotting, no planning, just living in the temple.

Once you've sorted out the issues with the Demon Cultists and their followers, there shouldn't be any major threats on the horizon.

We'll have to figure out what to do with Akasha as we go along.

Vali the Great wanted to create a world of Akasha, a world where humans and demons would never have to face each other. He wanted an eternal end to fighting.

But just like humans, Bali didn't trust humans.

The humans wouldn't have believed them when they said they were going to activate Akasha and leave for a new world. They would have thought that the humans who coveted Akasha would take it away from them.

Akasha is a magical tool that, if misused, can spell doom for the world.

Therefore, until the day he died, he would not tell the Four Heavenly Kings and Vali about Akasha.

Believing in Valier Jr. or the second coming of the Devil, who will be resurrected in Charlotte's body.

And it was my son, myself, who prevented the return of the devil.

The only ones who knew the truth were the Four Thousand Kings and Bali.

"Now I understand why Larken Simonsteid, a human....... sided with the Darklands......."

The first Sichuan King and Grandmaster, who was human. And Larken Simonstein, the teacher of Saviolin Tana.

One way or another, Valier had either recruited Larken Steinmetz or he had come to Valier.

The end of fighting through complete separation from each other.

Valerie's thoughts were shared, and he sided with Darkland.

Because that would be a better ending.

But then came the Demon War, and the heroes killed the Four Heavenly Kings and the Demon King.

The warrior party may or may not have been told the truth about Akasha by the Four Heavenly Kings.

In the end, a fight broke out, and the brave party died along with the Demon King of the Four Realms and the Demon King.

The Warrior Party may have heard of Akasha and fought to capture it, but we don't know the details.

That's why the four kings may have taken on the warrior parties one by one to persuade them, rather than joining together.

But the truth is now unknowable. The truth of the fight is outside my perception.

What's done is done.

Akasha is in my hands.

But I'm not the only one who knows this place.

Charlotte and Tana already know of this place, and Charlotte has even decided to supply the imperial court with spellbooks from it.

She may not realize it now, but Charlotte will eventually realize that this place is very strange.

What happens when the imperial family finds out about Akasha.

Unknown.

But we can't just leave it at that.

Now that everything is clear, there's no reason to delay.

It is a very dangerous artifact, but it has infinite utility, and it may be the one thing that can end all feuds between demons and humans.

I may be the one to fulfill the dream that Valier never had, the one that Valier Jr. gave up on in the original.

If Charlotte messes with Akasha without knowing more about it, she could end up gating Charlotte, which is not a good thing.

"I'm sure there's a way to move Akasha to a different location, but that's something I'll have to figure out later......."

Once I was missing from Richie's grave, I knew there would be an uproar.

"First, we need to get back to the ecliptic."

The later I come back, the more out of control the situation will get.

\* \* \*

"An instrument of creation......."

Outside the battlefield.

Antirrhinus listened to the story as he stood facing Akrich.

"Yeah, you guys have Akasha and you don't even seem to realize it's Akasha."

Akrich Lukren came to Ritchie's grave because the spellbook contained magic that Cantus Magna had developed.

With the discovery of Akasha's traces, Lukren realized this was his last chance to retrieve her.

Why I couldn't find Cantus Magna until now.

Why Lukren came to Ritchie's grave alone.

It all made sense to Antirrhinus.

Cantus Magna was destroyed when Akasha was stolen and, unable to determine who had stolen her, they suspected each other.

And it wasn't someone on the inside who stole Akasha, it was the Ancestral Demon Valie.

And the current Demon King didn't realize until now that what he held was Akasha.

"If you help me get Akasha back, I'll forget what you've done. Tell me, Antirianus, where is Akasha?"

All that is past is forgotten, as long as you cooperate in finding the lost tools of creation.

Antirrhinus shakes his head slightly at Akrich's words.

Whether you believe it or not is another matter.

"Lucren, why do you want to be a god?"

"......what?"

"Do you think it would be fun to be a god?"

Antirrhinus narrowed his eyes as if he didn't understand Lucren's words.

"To be the absolute, where everything in the world functions according to my will and I can orchestrate everything to my will."

"So why do you assume it's going to be fun?"

Antirhynchus smiles at you.

"The joy of life and the world is its unpredictability."

"Do you think that an all-powerful force that functions only in a world where everything moves according to my will, and only according to my will, and where at a wave of my hand everything returns to nothingness, can give you what you call pleasure?"

"Yeah, it might be fun for a little while."

"But you'll soon lose interest."

"If you don't like it, you tear it down and rebuild it, tear it down and rebuild it, tear it down and rebuild it, and at the end of the process, what's left but boredom?"

"For what is there left but boredom?"

"If delusions of grandeur are the only aspirations that Cantus Magna has ever nurtured....... I am exceedingly disappointed."

"The world is only pleasant as a creature. If you become a god and create a world, however perfect it may be, and if you face it not as a creature but as a creator, what can you gain from it but admiration for the technical solidity of a well-made sculpture?"

"Without despair, sorrow, pain, anger, hatred, and wrath, there would be no joy, ecstasy, ecstasy, pleasure, and, of course, happiness and love."

"Lukren. The world is chaos, and I love it."

"Being an organizer of chaos is, as it turns out, a very boring job."

Antirrhynchus's words made Lucren forget.

"You're crazy, you'll stop at nothing to become a god."

"If you're going to use Akasha for something so boring, I can't have you having Akasha."

Antirrhinus smiles.

"I told you, Lukren. I've always wondered what Akasha was, never thought I wanted it."

Antirrhinus raised his staff.

"At least the boy I know will have more fun with Akasha than you will."

"Antirrhinus....... This crazy old man......."

Lucren, still recovering from the aftereffects of using magic on such a large scale, was no match for Antrianus now.

There is only one reason to reject the path to godhood: it would be boring.

Lucren sees the madness flashing in the old vampire's golden eyes.

"Lucren, will you show me your despair one last time?"

The embodiment of madness beyond good and evil.

"Show me the pain, despair, and wretchedness of having an aspiration that has been dreamed of for an immeasurably long time, only to end up in this place."

A mad wizard in search of despair and heat.

"After all this time, you've shown me a very uninteresting vision, so the least I can do is give you a proper scream."

Antirrhinus raised his staff.

Episode 429.

Not long ago.

Daytime.

Radia Schmidt was on the back foot.

Charlotte and Ellen were walking slowly toward Radia Schmidt.

"......."

Radia does not know the situation. She recognizes the face of the Empress, but not the face of Ellen.

But we do know that he was a classmate of Reinhardt's, and that they both showed up at the Vampire Council out of nowhere.

Radia's head spins rapidly.

We don't know what brought them to EpiAxis, or what they were looking for. We do know that Radia Schmidt is the only one left at EpiAxis.

Two girls approach, seemingly convinced of something.

"Do you know Reinhardt?"

The dark-haired girl, approaching, asks.

At that, Radia Schmidt gritted her teeth. It might be known that Reinhardt was a demon.

"I think I know."

The girl's voice, tinged with despair, rang pitifully in Radia's ears, as if her inability to answer had already convinced her of something.

Reinhardt's identity is discovered.

Demon Reinhardt, Eleris's main enemy.

If she asks for help, they will bring her into the world.

He's been kidnapped by a demonic force and is stranded in the middle of nowhere, unable to leave.

They allow you to get back out into the world.

But.

Because what the heck is there.

What the heck do you want there.

How can you go out into the world and hope for anything when you have nothing of value and want to deny your faith?

Radia doesn't know why she needs to leave; she'd rather stay here, in the little warmth she can feel.

But those two.

They will tell the world what they have seen here.

Reinhardt's identity would be discovered, and Elise would suffer the consequences.

Radia does not serve Reinhardt as her lord.

However, when he was forced to kill himself, he was spared by Eleris' pleas.

And the result.

If Radia, whom Elise saved, becomes a stumbling block, Reinhardt's identity is discovered, and he is killed.

Imagine the self-pity that the kindly vampire would feel.

Eventually, he would realize that his clumsy mercy had led to the death of his lord. Radia could not imagine the pain.

If my presence is a threat to Reinhard, she will blame herself for it.

The face that always smiles will be contorted with sadness, despair, and pain.

It will be.

If my presence brings Eleris despair at Reinhardt's death.

We need to make sure that doesn't happen.

Radia doesn't know why the two girls are here or how they know.

However.

Those two shouldn't go back.

-Woof!

Radia Schmidt's body is engulfed in a halo.

Say nothing.

Because no matter what you say, it could be a clue.

"Sorry, guys."

Radia shut her mouth, leaving only those words.

-grunt

-Pulp!

As if on cue, the approaching girl raised a silver sword in her right hand and draped a cloak of sunlight over her shoulders.

"Holy Grail?

Not one, but two.

Radia gritted her teeth.

What the hell is he doing with two holy relics?

Before that question could be answered, Radia saw an even more unbelievable sight.

A black aura flowed through the entire body of the empress behind her, and she soon turned into a grotesque figure that seemed to be engulfed in darkness.

The Empress raises her index finger to the sky.

-Self!

A sharp spear of darkness appeared from thin air above her fingertips.

The Empress points her finger at herself.

That one.

Dangerous.

-Quack, quack, quack!

Radia threw herself forward, and dozens of dark spears slammed into the castle's floor with a deafening crash.

A bizarre and ominous power, followed by two holy relics.

"......."

Radia stares at the two girls.

This is not an opponent to be trifled with.

"This is my grave.

The light on Radia's body grows redder and redder.

-Currrrr!

Specialized power used by paladins of Alth.

Berserk.

Radia Schmidt burns lives.

For Elyse.

\* \* \*

Radia Schmidt won last year's Unlimited tournament.

Of course, her victory was due to the withdrawal of her final opponent Olivia Ranche, but Radia Schmidt's skills are nothing to sneeze at.

I didn't make it to graduation, but I am a graduate of the Temple Royal class.

The best of the best and the brightest.

In other words, it's safe to say that you're already one of the best Paladins in the game.

So in terms of skill, Olivia is just as good as Ellen Artorius.

And then there was Alth's holy power, which specialized in combat, and even now he had enhanced himself with the power of Berserk, which was not a normal enhancement, but a life-burning one.

-Bam!

"Boom!"

Ellen bounced off the ramen and rolled across the floor of the castle.

-Ka-ka-ka-ka-kang!

He dodged Charlotte's summoned Spear of Darkness in an acrobatic move, using only his fuselage vision to track its trajectory, while simultaneously charging forward and unleashing his regime on Charlotte.

-shhh!

Ducking into the shadows, Charlotte reappeared about ten paces behind him.

For a moment, Ellen and Charlotte are surprised by the unexpected visitor, but Radia Schmidt hasn't said a word and is planning to kill Charlotte and Ellen.

Ellen staggered to her feet.

Radia Schmidt lunges toward her at near lightning speed, delivering a spinning back kick with her full weight.

"Suck!"

-Bam!

Rafelt's defense blocked the kick, but it couldn't fully offset the impact, forcing Ellen to take a few steps to the side.

The kick bounced off the flames' recoil, but Radia only took a few steps back as she righted herself.

Royal Class seniors are all monsters.

Even with the aid of two holy symbols, and even with Charlotte using her mysterious powers, Ellen was losing ground.

There was so much she didn't understand.

It was Radia Schmidt who took Reinhardt to Elena's shop.

Then there's Radia Schmidt in the place where Elena's statue is supposedly located.

And then Radia Schmidt tries to kill them all.

There are so many things I don't understand.

I don't understand this situation.

One thing's for sure though.

Reinhardt said.

It's not like you're a warrior.

-Kurung!

Ellen lunges at Radia, but Radia deflects the blow with a gourd and drives her fist into Ellen's heart.

-Quack!

But his fist sliced through the air, its trajectory deflected by a spear of darkness summoned from the side.

But Radia Schmidt twisted around with her left hand, her sword drawn, and caught Ellen's ramen in her armpit.

Alth's divine powers and enchantments.

Radia's physical prowess with the Berserk is not something Ellen can match.

-Whoosh!

In one sweeping motion, Ellen was swept into Radia's arms, along with Lament.

-Bam!

"Off......black!"

Radia leaps at the incoming Ellen, who misses her sword and bounces off into the distance.

With the intention of crushing your head.

-Whoosh!

-Bang! Quack! Kakakakang!

But as she lunged, a wave of dark spears appeared at her side, knocking her back.

"Ah....... ugh....... 우욱......."

Staggering to her feet, Ellen gagged, unable to stand.

Pinned to the castle wall with a dark spear, Radia Schmidt wakes up covered in stone dust, seemingly unharmed.

"Crazy....... monstrous......."

Radia Schmidt was so dominant over Ellen and Charlotte that Charlotte, in her dark form, forgot what she looked like.

Two Holy Grails.

And the power of the devil.

She is not yet able to wield the demon's power as destructively as she did during her rampage, and even then, the nature of Charlotte's power, which grows stronger at night, means that she is not at full strength.

But it's still the power of the devil.

It is dominated by a single royal class elite graduate.

Charlotte was experiencing what monsters the Empire was raising in this place called the Temple in a way she never wanted to experience.

Temples, Empires.

And the greatness of humanity.

It was too good to be true, and now the power was trying to kill him.

"......."

Radia was silent.

Like I'm not going to let you guys be sure of anything.

If you don't kill them and I die, it could be because of something you said.

The Silent Crusader looms over them like a terror.

Ellen staggered back to her feet.

Attack laments.

Lapel in defense.

Since he has two Relics, he is effectively a Swordmaster with similar requirements.

Is Radia too strong, or is she not capable of using the power of the Relic to its fullest extent?

Ellen Artorius doesn't know.

I don't know that Radia Schmidt is fighting with the strength of her life right now.

However.

If you die on the spot.

You don't know what the truth is.

Why it happened, why it had to happen, and who the hell it was.

Why.

You cared so much for me.

I don't know.

You die without knowing.

"I hate......."

Ellen says.

Radia Schmidt doesn't know why anyone would want to kill her.

But as it is, it will die.

You have two holy relics, but you can't do anything about the crusader in front of you.

When you die, it's all over.

"I'm....... I can't die here."

Ellen gritted her teeth as she saw Radia Schmidt approaching.

What you need to do to win against a powerful foe named Radia Schmidt. Even with enchantments and two powerful holy relics, you can't defeat this monster.

Ellen stirs her ramen and stares at Radia Schmidt, who is engulfed in a reddish updraft.

Radia Schmidt's skill with the Berserk was more than even Olivia Ranze could handle.

If we had stayed the course, there's no telling what the outcome would have been.

Radia Schmidt steps up to the plate.

I wasn't trying to make a leap.

-Bam!

The shockwave of the foot slamming into the ground itself creates a crack in the ground, and the walls of the castle begin to crack.

-Twitter

The walls of the castle, where the cracks began, begin to collapse.

-currrrrr

The castle's floors and walls crumble, the ceiling collapses, and boulders fall.

-Thump! Kukung! Thump!

The dark castle is bathed in white light.

-Heeeeeeeeeeeee!

A bitterly cold blizzard blows in, painting everything white.

'I realize my power is weakened by the presence of light....... Is it an intuition.......'

Charlotte gritted her teeth as she cowered in the darkness, watching the collapsing ceiling.

Radia Schmidt rushes toward Ellen in the fierce winter winds that have been unleashed by the collapse of the castle.

-Bam!

"Boom!"

-Bang!

Ellen was knocked back with a single punch, leaving her in the rubble of the collapsed castle.

"ugh....... black......."

The opponent is too strong.

Before you can even react, they rush in and start pummeling you.

-Bang! Quack! Bang!

Radia's attacks were fierce and furious, and would have turned to blood if not for Rafelt's protection.

-Quack!

Radia's body flinched at Charlotte's dark spear, but it didn't bounce back like it had before.

The blizzard alone had greatly weakened Charlotte's power by driving away the darkness.

-Bang!

"Hmph!"

Ellen rolled to the side, dodging a fist that flew into her face with difficulty.

As if bounced, Ellen settles into position and quickly steps back to assume her stance.

Stall for time and Radia's breath is gone.

But Ellen doesn't know that.

She doesn't know, and she has a hunch that at this rate, both Charlotte and herself will die at the hands of Radia Schmidt's unknown enemies.

You'll die.

I don't want to die, there's so much I need to know, so many things I need to hear, so many questions I need to ask.

All of it must die unfinished.

I don't want to do that.

Even better than dying.

I'm afraid and loath to die without knowing the truth.

Ellen says again.

If you don't want to die, you have to win.

You have to be strong to win.

If you must lose and die because your opponent is stronger than you.

Be strong.

Ellen Artorius clears her throat.

"Slowly, you get used to focusing your enchantment in smaller and smaller increments over your entire body, to an extreme point.

I'm reminded of the words of Saviolin Tana.

"In detail.

Repeat after me.

He sees the Red Crusader coming toward him.

-Heyyyyyy!

In a blizzard of bitter north winds that threatened to rip your skin off.

"Focus.

Give it your full attention.

"Eventually, we'll even be able to have enchantments at our fingertips.

I don't want to die.

There are things you need to know, things you need to hear.

Forgiveness, revenge, or understanding. We don't know yet.

Because you don't want to die without knowing where the hell all the stories end up, or which way all the truth flows.

If you don't want to die, you have to win.

If you can't win as you are.

"Self. and beyond this stage.

You have to be the one to beat.

"ha ha......."

Ellen steadies her breathing and focuses her attention on recognizing every tiny shred of mana in her body.

If you don't want to die, you must not lose, and if you don't want to lose, you must be stronger than your opponent.

There is only one path for Ellen, who must be stronger than her opponent.

Breaking through the wall and taking the next step.

Beyond using disenchantment.

Beyond getting comfortable with disenchantment, you need to take the next step.

"This is what happens when you reach the extremes of horsepower operation.

Ellen's magical energy coursing through her body grows less and less frequent as her fiery form fades.

Just as disenchantment became impossible.

Very thin, very thin, even the blue light is very thin.

It turns into a faint glow that threatens to go out.

It's not dead.

It will be compressed.

Extremely compressed mana stops flailing around uselessly to serve only as protection.

And.

To the ramen in Ellen's hand.

Slowly, as if on fire.

Blue energy flows through the sword.

When Radia Schmidt saw it, she stopped walking.

"This is...... what?"

Because the unthinkable is happening right in front of you.

Soon, the spark of magic in the laments enveloped the entire sword god.

"ha ha......."

The white breath from Ellen's mouth scatters on the winter wind.

A girl with an enchanted sword, not an enchanted body.

"That's the condition of the master class.

-shhhh!

"......!"

The next moment, Ellen Artorius was stabbing ramen into Radia Schmidt's heart.

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Radia Schmidt stared wide-eyed at Ellen's sword sheathed in her chest.

"Is this....... What the hell......?"

Awaken as a Swordmaster during battle.

It's ridiculous, but there are people who have done it right in front of our eyes.

I didn't think it would be an easy fight, which is why I used the life-burning power of Berserk.

Radia thought this kind of thing was only in stories.

But the reality of what was happening in front of him had already pierced his heart.

-Swoosh!

"K......breathe!"

Ellen pulled out the ramen, and Radia immediately fell to the ground, her legs giving out.

The girl with the two orbs became a Swordmaster when the power of the orbs proved too much for her to handle.

A genius that doesn't even deserve the word genius.

What the heck have I been building up to?

If I can grit my teeth and focus my mind in a fight I can't lose, I can easily become a Swordmaster. Why in the world is such a thing possible?

Radia Schmidt was a genius.

He didn't think there were enough geniuses at his level to run over.

Radia feels a sense of disorientation.

At this moment, Radia was having a similar feeling to the one she had when she saw Olivia Ranze.

A genius who always stood out from the crowd, even in the Temple Royal class of geniuses, a genius who no one dared even think of messing with.

That's the kind of genius you look up to with awe and admiration, and eventually end up worshipping.

Is the girl in front of you that kind of genius?

Even you are gifted with unreasonable talent, and you are even more unreasonable.

Radia Schmidt was a victim of injustice.

What happens when they go back.

I couldn't put my finger on it, but something was about to happen, a chain of unfortunate events. That's why I didn't want to let them live.

But it failed.

Something was going to happen to Reinhard and Elise.

Alth's divine power does not have the power to heal.

As such, healing wounds like any other paladin was out of the question for Radia Schmidt.

Recoil with Berserk, and critical hits.

Consciousness fades away.

'Safely....... I was hoping you'd come back.......'

"Kool-Aid!"

With a gulp of blood, Radia Schmidt tries to grasp the edge of her fading consciousness, but it's slipping away faster than she can reach it.

He had hoped that Elise would return home safely, but instead, he had gotten himself into this mess.

What would the vampire think about his death?

Radia doesn't know.

However.

There are tears the kindly vampire will shed for her, Radia knows.

They say the gods plan everything.

Everything in the world seems to be going according to their plan.

Maybe his own death is one of those plans.

'I don't know.......'

Slowly closing her eyes, Radia continues to sink into the depths of unconsciousness.

If this is all part of the gods' plan, Radia says.

Now I could find no reason to love those gods.

\* \* \*

In front of Radia Schmidt's lifeless body on her knees, Ellen stood still in the blizzard.

"You....... what did you do?"

Charlotte asked in disbelief as she approached through the blizzard.

"Because we have to win."

Ellen said nothing more than that and sent the ramen back.

Awakening in combat.

It was in the midst of a battle, with a power boost and a move to Swordmaster. But Ellen didn't collapse in a heap of blood like last time.

-Woof

Ellen checks the power of her enchantment, which is only a trickle in her right hand.

-curl!

And then the magic in her hands burst into flames, soaring higher than Ellen's height.

It cannot be refined into the shape of a sword, but it can emit powerful emissions.

Partial disenchantment followed by outward radiation.

I had the strength to not lose, but this level of talent is a bit odd.

I know I'm not the norm, but this is a bit much.

Ellen felt fortunate to have escaped death, but she also felt a strange sense of strangeness.

Charlotte stares at Radia Schmidt's body, chilling in the cold winter wind.

"So, who was this guy?"

Charlotte watched the tournament, but even after the battle was over, she didn't know who her opponent was.

"Radia Schmidt, sixth grader in Royal Class. Although she's not in sixth grade now, because that was last year."

"......Ladia Schmidt?"

At that, Charlotte narrowed her eyes.

Charlotte had heard the name by another route. She knew it as the name of a missing Temple Royal class student, presumed dead in the attack on the Levereer Ranch.

"This guy, I thought he was killed in the last Crusader raid. I was assuming he was from an unnamed order......."

"......Are you sure?"

"......I've heard he had extremist tendencies, but how do you know about the nameless order?"

"It's not that hard to figure out."

Reinhardt took a certain dark-haired Temple girl to Elena's shop.

Where Elena's statue is, Radia Schmidt is.

It seems very likely that Reinhardt was accompanied by Radia Schmidt.

Olivia Ranze was forced to withdraw after meeting Radia Schmidt in the unlimited weight tournament.

Reinhardt went to the game, and Olivia doesn't know what happened to him afterward.

Olivia was lured to a monastery south of the ecliptic by an unnamed order.

If so, Reinhardt would have been in Elena's shop with Radia Schmidt around that time.

And Radia Schmidt didn't die in the Crusader raid, she's in Castle Epiax.

Have I been kidnapped?

If so, they couldn't figure out why they were being attacked.

"I have a place to go first."

The purpose of coming here is essentially to check out Elena's statue.

I realize that something unexpected happened and it's messing with our case reasoning, but it was something we needed to check first.

\* \* \*

Part of the castle Epirus collapsed, but only partially, and the rest of the building was still standing.

"Is this....... there?"

"Yes."

Pantheon.

Arriving at a room of seven gargoyles, Ellen and Charlotte surveyed them. Several were weathered beyond recognition, but they soon found themselves standing in front of their target.

Of the seven statues, only Elena's was recognizable. Several of the statues had changed their appearance when the Council fell into human hands.

"It certainly....... look alike."

Charlotte compared the statue in her arms to the photo on Elena's ID and nodded slowly.

Elena had said she was a dragon, and I vaguely suspected that this place, Ellen, was like Dragon Rare.

"What the hell is this place, why was he here, and why was he trying to kill us?"

As Charlotte said, it was an incomprehensible mess.

What High Epirus is really like.

Why Reinhard went to Elena's shop with Radia Schmidt.

Radia Schmidt, a member of an unnamed religious order, wonders why she's stranded in this place that's supposedly Elena's stronghold.

Why she tried to kill us.

And.

Reinhardt said that night.

What you did.

"......."

Ellen remains silent and stares at Elena's statue.

Olivia Ranze in a trap.

Radia Schmidt is a member of a nameless order, so she must have known the trap that was being set for Olivia Ranze.

Elena is a powerful mage.

Suppose Reinhardt somehow learned of the plans of the Order of the Nameless One.

If so, out of character, Reinhardt would have tried to save Olivia.

At this point, we don't really know what Reinhardt's personality is like, but from what we've seen so far, it is.

Kidnapped Adriana.

Olivia was lured in by Adriana.

Reinhardt learned about it from Radia Schmidt.

"You got ......?

"Yeah, I don't know why, but a winged demon saved me and Adriana, and then it left us far away and went off somewhere, and that was that.

'Why on earth would.......'

"I'm the one who wants to know why.

Olivia Ranze says she can't figure out why the devil saved her.

She thought the demon might actually be good, that he might actually hate humans. No, now she hates humans.

You didn't just save Olivia on a whim during a raid on the Crusaders.

"You were trying to save him in the first place......?

Ellen gritted her teeth.

I can feel the emotions stirring inside of me.

Anger, a sense of betrayal.

And.

Deprivation.

A strange, unidentifiable feeling began to creep through my body.

Whatever Reinhardt's big secret is.

If the devil and Reinhardt are involved, you've already taken a very big risk by doing so.

That's how I got caught up in the tailspin.

Reinhardt is no fool.

You knew it would happen, you knew it would leave a trail, and you knew it would happen because there must be a rationale for the incomprehensible.

Still, it was saved.

At great risk.

One reason.

Because it's that important.

The.

As well as.......

"......."

Ellen gritted her teeth in spite of herself.

"Charlotte, there's something you need to hear."

It was Olivia's most important secret, and if it got out, it could cost her her life, so Ellen had no choice but to keep quiet about it.

But when it came to the big question of tracking down the demon, and Reinhardt was involved, there could be no secrets.

The end is near.

These vague inferences and the clues we've accumulated are starting to bite us in the ass.

The reasoning gradually began to take shape.

\* \* \*

"That happened?"

"Yes."

"No, why do you say that now....... After, yeah. There's no point in talking about it now."

When Ellen told her the details of the Crusader raid, Charlotte crossed her arms and pondered.

Charlotte's reasoning is similar to Ellen's.

Olivia in the trap. And Adriana.

Having survived the demon's attack unharmed, they kept quiet, fearing that if it became public knowledge, they would be told that they were the demon's informants.

"And Reinhardt told them about it, and now he's taking Adriana in at the Rotary Club because she's having trouble deciding where to live......."

"Yes."

It doesn't make sense to say that Reinhardt was trying to find a way to help.

But now they know about the suspicious circumstances that occurred the day before.

And Radia Schmidt, who was probably involved in the incident, is here.

It's clear that neither Adriana nor Olivia know the full story.

Charlotte tries to process her newfound knowledge. She doesn't know about Radia Schmidt's existence and how the castle Epiaks actually relates to the sorceress Elena.

But one thing's for sure.

You can no longer skim the periphery.

You have to stop thinking out of fear that it might not be.

Now, we need to investigate Reinhardt.

What to do to research Reinhardt.

Charlotte's fingertips were shaking.

It wasn't just the cold.

The more you get to the heart of the story, the more you nibble at the edges of the truth.

The situation was becoming increasingly unbearable for Charlotte.

"......."

And it was no different for Ellen.

Episode 431.

Ellen and Charlotte returned to the ecliptic.

Ellen asks what to do with Radia Schmidt's body, but Charlotte says it's evidence and should be kept.

The discovery of Temple's disappearance in the castle of Epiaks is a big deal, regardless of the truth of the case, and one of the pieces of evidence.

At a stopover, a wooden coffin was airlifted in which Radia Schmidt's body was placed, and they returned to the ecliptic.

It didn't take long to get back to the ecliptic from the bitterly cold land.

People were looking at Ellen as if she were an oddity, dragging a wooden pipe, but neither of them were in any condition to care what others thought.

"Reinhardt must have gone to investigate Richie's grave, that's what I know."

Ellen nodded at Charlotte's words.

In the meantime, Reinhardt is in the Darklands with the Imperial Elite and Harriet to investigate a murder on the Ecliptic.

Ellen and Charlotte don't know what Reinhardt wants.

However.

As Charlotte headed toward the palace with the woodcutter in tow, she stopped dead in her tracks.

"......."

Charlotte stopped walking, so Ellen glared at her.

Ellen watches as Charlotte's face contorts in depression and pain.

"Ellen......."

"Yes."

"I....... can't do it."

Charlotte's voice was shaking violently with depression.

"I....... This....... This, with my hands....... I can't do anymore....... I can't do it anymore......."

Charlotte didn't have the courage to take another step forward, knowing that the truth she would discover would shatter her.

Now I need to know something, I need to dig.

Charlotte felt like she couldn't do anything more, as the truth seemed to be staring her in the face.

They're both intuiting something.

But intuition alone doesn't solve anything.

I need to get to the bottom of this, to have some reason to believe something. Ellen stares at Charlotte.

"Yeah."

"......."

Charlotte can't go any further.

Ellen was scared now, too, and she couldn't blame Charlotte, knowing what it was like to be scared and not want to back down, but end up backing down.

Ellen was afraid to dig deeper.

She has no intention of stopping, but Charlotte can't see the truth she's uncovered with her own eyes.

"Let's go to Bertus."

We need another power.

\* \* \*

Bertus was having a busy time.

An incident inside the imperial palace.

Imperial elites set out to search the tomb of the Reach, but they weren't sure if the beast was truly there.

So there was still a search going on inside the palace, as well as across the ecliptic, and at Lothar Dwyn's home.

He was cautious about retrieving the spellbook Dwin had left behind, in case it had been tampered with.

Not only was the emperor busy with this, but the prince was also doing his own thing.

So it's understandable that I'd be annoyed by a request for an interview from a half-brother who looked like he'd been out of town for the weekend.

I didn't have time to discuss personal matters when I had enough on my plate, and I didn't see any reason to add to the nervousness that was already there.

But when Bertus heard reports that Charlotte had not come alone, but with Ellen Artorius, and that they had come to the Winter Palace with a wooden casket containing an unidentified corpse, he knew something was amiss.

And when I saw them both in their mismatched heavy coats, I was convinced.

Something's been going on over here, too.

"What's going on?"

But they were also tired and sensitive, so Bertus sat them down and got to the point.

Charlotte was speechless.

Ellen was speechless.

However, Charlotte grabbed a quill pen from the table and began to scribble something down.

But Bertus noticed that Charlotte's hand was shaking violently as she scribbled something down.

"......What's wrong with you?"

"......."

Charlotte remains silent at Bertus's question, her head down, scribbling away.

Why write when you can speak?

Because it holds the possibility of a truth that is too disastrous and frightening to speak.

His hand was shaking so badly that the writing was a mess, but not unrecognizable. Ellen didn't speak, just stared out the window.

There was no time for this, but Bertus remained still, waiting for Charlotte to finish scribbling something down.

For a half-brother who would rather die than show weakness, to do something like this must mean something very important.

"......here."

The scribbled words on the paper Charlotte handed me.

Bertus slowly begins to read it.

It summarized what Charlotte had learned so far, albeit in a confusing handwriting.

From the past, when Charlotte actually had some idea of the Demon's whereabouts, to Elena's.

Letters delivered and evaporated and tracked. The raid on Leverier Ranze. And Olivia and Adriana.

The visit to the castle of Epiax and the gargoyles, as well as the story of the attack on Radia Schmidt there and the wooden coffin they brought with them containing the body of the missing Radia Schmidt.

All those stories were about different things, but they were all pointing to one thing.

Reinhardt.

[It is very possible that Reinhardt was a person associated with the Devil].

The horribly distorted handwriting spoke volumes about Charlotte's misery at having to write it in her own hand.

The shock of the sentence itself, aside from the hard evidence and rationale behind its content, left Bertus speechless.

"Nonsense."

So, after a long silence, Bertus' first words could only be.

"I wish....... I hope so. Please, please, please I hope so....... I really hope so....... I really want....... Really......."

In front of Bertus, Charlotte's hands in her lap with her head bowed.

Bertus watched, wide-eyed, as a tear fell on him.

Even more than this unbelievable suspicion, Bertus was horrified that Charlotte was crying in front of him.

"I....... I was going to....... I did, but....... I can't do it anymore....... You, you can't....... I thought you could do it for me....... If you do......."

If Reinhardt was connected to the Devil, the revelation would be devastating to the empire and the imperial family, but they had caught a very serious security threat.

Just as Bertus's elimination of the revolutionary forces had taken the initiative out of the hands of the monarchy, this was a big enough deal that Charlotte could use it to get back into the race for the throne.

But Charlotte holds onto the clue and hands it over to Bertus.

It even asks.

I want you to finish the rest.

The truth, already half-convinced, is so painful that he asks Bertus to dig it all out for him, fearing that he will destroy himself.

No, it's already broken.

Still staring out the window, Ellen wordlessly put her arm around Charlotte's shoulders.

Despite her expressionlessness, Ellen is probably not much different than Charlotte when she investigates this together.

Ellen is not expressionless.

I was stunned.

Bertus looks back and forth between Charlotte and Ellen.

A broken half-brother. A disenchanted classmate.

And Reinhardt.

Seeing Charlotte in a panic, Bertus takes the paper into his arms.

Reinhardt is associated with the Devil.

What happens if this is true.

I don't have time for "that" stuff, like what happened at the imperial palace.

Bertus stares at his half-brother, who is begging for help, his life in tatters and completely broken.

If this is true.

How Charlotte de Gradias would feel betrayed.

You've been used, you've been taken advantage of, and you've been taken advantage of.

You've been betrayed by everything you've tried to find a home for.

Bertus is more pathetic than ever to his half-brother.

With more heart than ever before.

"Don't cry, brother."

"......."

"I've got this."

He said.

\* \* \*

Charlotte returned to the Palace of Spring, while Ellen stayed behind with Bertus.

Bertus and Ellen opened the wooden pavilion guarded by Winter Palace troops.

"Identification?"

"Missing Temple alumna Radia Schmidt has been identified."

"I see."

It had Ellen's endorsement, but it was also cross-validated.

Temple Royal Class Missing, Radia Schmidt, who was presumed dead during the raid on the Unnamed Order, has been found in the northernmost castle on the continent called Castle Epiax.

Radia Schmidt was killed by Ellen Artorius in combat after attacking Ellen and Charlotte de Gradias for an unexplained reason.

And in the pantheon-like structures that existed in that epoch, there were statues of wizards who supposedly hid the demons.

The day before the Demon's Crusade raid, Reinhardt visited Elena's scroll shop with Radia Schmidt.

Everything you need to know was written down on paper by Charlotte and passed on to you.

The conclusion is that Reinhardt is suspect.

Ever since that last unpleasant cross-dressing incident, Bertus had purposely avoided thinking about Reinhardt.

I gave up trying to understand it because I couldn't figure out why it was happening.

'......That's crazy.'

If Reinhardt has something to do with the Devil, then what the hell is that woman!

Bertus bit his tongue slightly, feeling like another accident was about to happen to him. To get his mind right.

The cross-dressing incident, after all.

As much as he hated to think about it, Bertus couldn't deny that there was a clue there.

What Charlotte and Ellen didn't know, and what they were both too afraid to ask Reinhardt directly, Bertus had already done.

If you've never thought of Reinhardt as suspicious, it's just something to do, but if you do think of Reinhardt as suspicious, it's the one clue you can't help but reach for.

'You said your identity was registered last year, obviously.'

Last year.

He wasn't wrong when he reported that many beggars were unregistered.

But it's odd when you think about it in terms of Reinhardt being suspicious.

Reinhardt suddenly appeared on the ecliptic last year.

Reinhardt didn't exist. At least until two years ago.

And another clue.

Reinhardt told him that the silver-haired girl he had seen that day was him.

There's no point in confessing to a heinous deed if you're not going to say it out loud, so Bertus and Reinhardt had to deal with a bizarre situation every time they met.

I didn't really need to say it.

"That's me.

Nevertheless, when Reinhard said he was going to do some research to find his brother, he had a seizure and blurted out the truth.

Bertus doesn't know why Reinhardt was cross-dressing.

Most importantly, Reinhardt confessed something he shouldn't have confessed anyway.

"They were afraid of the investigation itself.

I don't want Bertus to know things he shouldn't know, so I'm telling him before he gets to the dangerous stuff.

Risking embarrassment is one thing, risking death is another.

Reinhardt went to a cross-dressing contest. We don't know why.

But as soon as he heard that Bertus was investigating, speculating that the girl might be Reinhardt's brother, he gave up the truth.

That said.

This means that if you research Reinhardt, you'll learn things you shouldn't know.

"Get the date of Reinhardt's identity registration against the date of Charlotte's return to the ecliptic."

"Yes, Your Highness."

"And Ellen."

"Yes."

"There's a Rotary club south of the ecliptic. Do you know that?"

"......I know."

At Bertus's question, Ellen nodded.

"Take them in and interrogate them, drag them out if you have to."

"......Okay."

Ellen nodded slowly, and led the group of people Bertus had selected out of the palace.

Bertus watches Ellen's back as she leaves.

Did Reinhardt really come out of nowhere?

And when is that time?

What the hell is Reinhardt doing?

Bertus wants to know.

The image of Charlotte's horrified face could not leave Bertus's mind.

Episode 432.

"Mr. Daibun, where did your sister go?"

"Sister, I don't think she'll be back until tomorrow or the day after, she had to go somewhere."

"I see."

"What about your sister?"

"No, I just haven't seen you since yesterday."

Adriana chatted in passing as she carried a basket of laundry and hung it on the clothesline outside. Other members of the club, some of whom were also working, stood beside Adriana as she washed, some of whom were walking through the already crisp drying laundry.

I spent a few months in the Rotary Club.

Adriana had gotten used to life here.

Everyone in the club now looked like a human being.

Of course, by the time Adriana came to live here, the Rotary Club's income was already stabilized, but there were still many people who hadn't gotten out of the rut that they'd been living in.

But a lot has changed since Adriana's arrival.

The most important thing was hygiene.

The hygiene of the captain, who was supposed to be an example to everyone, was extremely poor, and there were quite a few people in the club who were just as bad.

Once Adriana gave Loyar a thorough bath and checked his nails, it set the tone for the rest of the team to take charge of their own hygiene.

Everyone could not believe their eyes as they watched the fierce, vicious Irine wild dog turn into a pet dog in Adriana's presence.

Eventually, Adriana found herself in charge of the cleanliness, janitorial, and sanitation of the Rotary Club's headquarters.

Most of all, I realized that if I left Adriana alone without a boss, she would run around looking for something to do, and we would all do things like cleaning because there was nothing else to do.

Eventually, Adriana became something of an energizer bunny for the older members of the Rotary Club, who were pretty much living the life.

It makes you think that it's not disgusting to see a kid moving around trying to do one more thing, but as an adult, he's drunk and spread out.

So, after a night of booze-fueled revelry, sleeping in the hall or vomiting on the floor was a thing of the past, even if Adriana didn't say anything about it.

If we did drink, we would have a couple of drinks in moderation, and then when it was time for Adriana to go to bed, we would all quietly retire to my room and go to sleep.

He said, "Why be loud when he's sleeping?

Without realizing it, Adriana had become like a daughter to the entire Rotary Club.

During these months, Adriana also learned about some of the quirks of Rotary clubs.

Loyar usually spent most of his days lying on a couch in a reception room-like area on the top floor of the club's headquarters, or going for walks with Adriana.

Literally, I was just sitting there like a dog guarding the house.

The Rotary Club's business is also managed by subordinates, and Loyar doesn't know much about the specifics of what's going on or how much money is coming in.

In fact, it was slowly turning into a situation where I would talk to Adriana about things that needed approval and she would pass it on to Loyar.

And no matter what he was told, Loyar would just tell him to get on with it.

One day, Adriana asked Daibun. What does your sister do?

When asked, Daibun said that his sister had a lot of work to do when they lived under the bridge.

Typically, they said they would defend their club members in fights with other groups of beggars, or if a club member got beaten up somewhere, they would go and retaliate.

He was indispensable when they were a group of beggars under the bridge, Daibun told Adriana, even finding money from somewhere.

It's just that right now, the situation has unfolded and there's nothing for Loyar to do.

Adriana was grateful for that, because she couldn't think of anything better than to be free of fighting.

And even though it seemed a little rough, it was pretty interesting to hear that my sister was so good at fighting.

No one in the club hadn't seen Loyar in a fight, and many had even gotten beaten up.

Everyone was literally drooling over her fighting skills.

Anyway, as far as Adriana knew, Loyar used to be a very important part of the club, but now that things are better, he's just lying around with nothing to do.

Nevertheless.

Once a month or so, Loyar would be gone for a few days.

We only knew that he was going out of town for some reason, but he would suddenly disappear somewhere, only to return a few days later.

The club members were just going along with it like it was a given.

Now that I don't have to fight anymore, I wonder what she's up to.

Adriana was curious about that, but Loyar just said he had to run errands and didn't elaborate.

So I just assumed that it was something that Adriana didn't know much about.

It was one of those days.

Murders in the imperial court, dark clouds over the world. There was also the surprising news that Ellen, Reinhardt, and Olivia had become owners of a holy relic, but Reinhardt didn't come to the Rotary Club very often, so we didn't have time to talk about it.

So Adriana was just another day at the club's headquarters, on the ecliptic, but a little out of this world.

It was an afternoon like any other.

Adriana was cleaning the reception area on the top floor of the club. Adriana was working hard to clean up the long strands of white hair that had fallen on the couch.

It's a head of hair, but with the feeling of clearing away an animal's fur.

In the distance, Adriana could see a group of people approaching the club.

It's not like the club doesn't get outsiders, but it was a little weird.

And at the top of the list was a face Adriana recognized.

Ellen Artorius, sister of the warrior Ragan Artorius and holder of the Holy Ramen, was walking toward the club's headquarters at the head of the line of soldiers.

The recent revelations were startling, but Adriana had a stronger image of Ellen as Reinhardt's friend.

I've also been told that there have been quite a few cases of people coming to the club and getting beaten up by their sister.

Everyone in the club used to be tongue-in-cheek about how extraordinary it was that Ellen was actually the hero's sister.

Even though Adriana is now the club's little girl, Ellen knows everyone in the club, and people seem to like her.

But Ellen, looking as grave as she felt, was approaching the club at the head of a group of heavily armed soldiers.

"What is......?"

With a sense that something ominous is about to happen, the club members outside approach Ellen.

Contrary to her ominous premonition, Ellen began to have some conversations with the club members, and there was no indication that violence would be used.

However, one by one, the soldiers approach Ellen and the other club members and start talking to them.

The content was not heard.

What's going on.

I was getting up to leave when I realized I needed to get out too.

"Adriana."

As if on cue, Daibun rushed over and grabbed Adriana's arm.

"Da, Mr. Daibun?"

"Follow me."

Daibun began to drag Adriana down the stairs.

"Outside....... What's going on?"

"I'm not sure. But I think something's up."

Daibun quickly led Adriana down the stairs, as if there was something to be done before the soldiers entered the club's headquarters.

You've arrived at the club's basement.

When they reached the area where the groceries and other unsold inventory from the horse-train shop were stacked, Daibun pushed Adriana back against the wall and watched.

"Adriana, don't ask, don't tell, just follow the path I show you."

"Yes....... Yes?"

"Under the bridge south of Bronzegate, where our club used to be, leads to the Ecliptic Underground Sewers."

Daibun's expression was so serious, Adriana couldn't even ask a question.

"If you go deep enough into that sewer, you'll find your sister."

"Is that you? Why are you there......."

"I can't explain the details. Adriana, you care about your sister, don't you?"

"Yeah? Yeah....... Uh, yeah."

Adriana is very grateful and appreciative of Loyar for making her feel so important, and she now considers him family.

What's not to like about someone who protects and cares for you unconditionally?

"Follow the sewers to find your sister, and tell her to never come back here."

"What....... What are you talking about....... I'm not sure......."

-Drupa!

But Daibun had already fiddled with the walls, opening a secret chamber hidden in the basement wall.

What the hell is this in the Rotary Club basement?

It's as if it was intentionally created so that someone could get away with it.

Adriana didn't know.

Daibun looks at Adriana with wide eyes. As if he doesn't have time to explain much.

"After you have told your sister, you must leave the sewer quickly. You must get out quickly. Do not stay with your sister after you deliver these words. Never."

-delay

-jerky

Upstairs, the dull thud of the door opening was already sounding ominous.

"Adriana, after you have spoken, you must part ways with your sister before nightfall."

Daibun grabbed both of Adriana's shoulders and spoke again, as if to remind her never to forget.

\* \* \*

Adriana doesn't think she knows much about Rotary Clubs; she's just doing what she can on the spot, and she's just learning what Rotary really does.

But Adriana realized that she really didn't know anything.

I don't know why there's a secret passageway in the basement of the Rotary Club headquarters.

"Ha ha....... Ha ha......."

But Adriana was running.

Why did Ellen come to the Rotary Club headquarters with her soldiers, and what was she there to ask?

What is Loyaar doing in those underground sewers.

Why on earth would he tell Loyar this before nightfall and part ways.

Adriana knows nothing.

Adriana ran and ran and ran to do what Daibun desperately asked her to do, even though it might be dangerous for everyone.

The secret passage wasn't very long.

Adriana pushed up on the sewer lid-like exit and stepped out.

Instead of an ecliptic street, I saw a wooded forest.

It was an unobtrusive exit, so Adriana ran into the distant streets of the ecliptic.

Episode 433.

Adriana's physical condition was not comparable to the average person's, so she was able to reach the Bronzegate Bridge in no time.

However, the sun was getting low in the sky.

Daibun said that he and Loyar would have to part ways at night. He didn't know why, but he knew he had to see Loyar before nightfall.

Prior to this, the Rotary Club had been living under the Bronzegate Bridge, one of the many great bridges on the ecliptic, for many years.

With the trick-or-treaters gone, Bronzegate Bridge had gone from a place people avoided to a promenade.

Adriana could see a long passageway beneath the Bronze Gate piers, going under the bridge.

There weren't really any no trespassing signs, and when the Rotary Club took over, it was always full of beggars, so people didn't really try to get in.

But even with the beggars gone, the gaping maw of a deep sewer couldn't help but strike a chord of natural fear.

So no one wants to go into a place like that.

What is she doing in a place like this, and does everyone in the Rotary Club know about it?

Adriana walked down a different path from the crowds of strolling people, toward the sewers.

When the Rotary Club moved out, all the original haphazardly stitched-together houses had been torn down.

The sewers, where beggars huddled together, drunk on cheap booze, were clean as if they hadn't been there in ages.

This is where the entire Rotary Club has lived for quite some time.

How do we get sweltering summers and freezing winters?

Adriana was worried about that, even in the midst of this urgency.

In a hot place when it was hot, and in a cold place when it was cold. Those who had nowhere else to turn would huddle together, and together they would endure the heat and the cold.

He was the one they all trusted and relied on.

In his life as a beggar, Loyar has always protected his club members when thugs have called them names and threatened them.

Later, the Rotary Club members were too afraid of Loyar to touch him.

Soon Adriana was without a lantern, deep in the sewers of Sacramento's darkness.

It's dark everywhere, so Adriana summons an orb of light and walks slowly into the sewers.

The sewers weren't straight. The passageways were long and massive, but they also split in the middle, and Adriana had no idea where to turn to find Loyaar.

Adriana was surprised to find such a large underground aqueduct beneath the ecliptic.

I didn't really have any reason to think about what I couldn't see.

A long, massive sewer, somewhere in this place is Loyaar.

What the heck are we doing here.

In case she gets lost, Adriana considers going backwards, so she only heads forward, so she only has to go backwards to get back.

The orb of light could not illuminate everything in the vast sewers.

The longer she walked through the sewers, the more nervous Adriana became.

It's close to dusk when you enter, so it will soon be night.

We need to find Loyaar, and fast. From the look on Daibun's face, it was clear that the night and Loyar had something to do with it.

How many steps you took.

-Adriana?

A distant rumble came from somewhere in the sewers.

Sure enough, it was Loyar's voice.

"Sister?"

Adriana's words were met with distant approval.

"Adriana, why are you here......."

A figure approaches the orb of light that Adriana has lit.

Now, thanks to Adriana's constant washing and grooming, Loyar was walking toward her with a clean coat.

"How did you know to come here?"

Approaching, Loyar cupped Adriana's face, unable to hide his surprise.

"There's a bunch of soldiers at the club. I don't know what's going on, but....... Mr. Daibun said if I go here, I'll find my sister."

"Daibun? How did he get to......? And what do you mean by soldier?"

Loyar shook his head, as if he didn't understand what he was hearing.

"I don't know, Mr. Daibun told me....... to never come back to the club, that's what he said."

"What do you mean don't come back, and what about the soldiers?"

"I don't know, he, Ellen, had a bunch of soldiers, heavily armed soldiers, and they were asking the clubbers about something, so Mr. Daibun sent me out into a secret passage in the basement of the club and told me to tell them this......."

Adriana was the one who didn't speak English, but Loyar was the one who didn't understand the situation.

"Secret passageways? Why do you have them at headquarters?"

"......Didn't you know?"

No, you don't know that!

Adriana almost wanted to scream, despite the urgency of the situation.

"And....... After I deliver these words, I want you to break up with your sister quickly....... before nightfall......."

At that, Loyar's expression hardened.

Like, finally, something that didn't make sense makes sense.

"Ah....... They....... You knew all along......."

Adriana couldn't quite put her finger on it, but there was something about the look on Loyar's face that made her feel a little overwhelmed, bewildered, and somehow overwhelmed with emotion.

Adriana washed her face dry a few times. Adriana saw the water glisten in Loyar's eyes.

Just as Daibun did, this time Loyar grabs Adriana by both shoulders.

"Um, yeah. Adriana, I can't really elaborate, but I understand what you're saying, so just do as Daibun says and get out of here, and don't go back to the club either."

"Sis, what's going on? What the hell? What....... What's going on?"

Adriana shuddered with an unidentifiable fear.

"Adriana, you can't know about this. You can't know about this."

At Adriana's question, Loyar shook his head.

"What you don't know is good for you."

"My sister....... I'm scared. I'm....... Sis, will we never see each other again?"

You lose them without even realizing what happened.

Olivia is taken in by a nameless order for reasons she doesn't understand and nearly sacrificed.

Adriana began to sob, this time at the prospect of never seeing Loyar again, let alone the people she had just bonded with, without knowing why.

Loyaar gives his eyes strength.

Like you're trying to force down some simmering emotion and swallow it.

"Go on, I don't have time for a kid like you!"

"Uh, my sister......."

Adriana took a few steps back at the sight of Loyar's anger.

"Quickly....... Go quickly....... It will be night....... When it's night....... I won't recognize you......."

Because what the hell is night.

Adriana doesn't know what Loyar is talking about.

Something scary happens.

Now that the chain of events had begun, there was only one thing for Adriana to do: run.

In all these things.

They must run away from Loyaar as the night falls.

Adriana could see Loyar's face twist into a grim line as he tried to get her back.

"Holy....... Damn."

Like you felt something.

In the darkness behind him, a gravelly voice echoed through the sewers.

-You're here.

Into Adriana's white light, someone walks.

-Auntie.

Cloak of the Sun.

Ellen Artorius, wielding the Sword of the Moon, walked slowly toward them.

Loyar watched Ellen's approaching form with narrowed eyes.

Adriana could see it too.

Ellen's aura was like a blue aura, and the lunar divine sword laments were burning like blue fire.

"Sword......master?"

Adriana muttered, frozen.

"You....... this monstrous....... When the hell are you going to get there......?"

Loyardo wasn't the only one who was stunned.

"There are a lot of things I want to ask you, things I've never tried to find out, things I thought were weird but never asked....... I'm going to ask them now."

Ellen stood still, staring at Loyar, the man who had beaten her so many times before.

"So, you have to be honest with me."

Ellen remains still with her Auror Sword and Auror Armor as she speaks to Loyaar, indicating that she has a fight in mind but will not use her hands first.

Loyar stares at Ellen for a moment.

I had a sneaking suspicion that the growth rate of this monster had surpassed even the geniuses, let alone the culprits.

But before I knew it, I was a Swordmaster.

And by the look in his eyes and the way he was acting, he was already convinced of something.

The warrior's sister.

Ellen Artorius.

Is it possible to run away.

No.

Loyard's senses tell him.

It's impossible to escape. It's not because of Ellen's skills.

The time is drawing near.

"Dark-haired kid."

To my lord's dear one, who is too old to be called a child.

"Beat me."

"......?"

"By all means, beat me."

Ellen narrows her brow at Loyar's strange words.

Loyar gripped Adriana's shoulder, still frozen.

And then.

-Whoosh!

"Uh, sister!"

"!"

Loyar throws Adriana right back at Ellen, who panics and throws the ramen back at him.

Loyaar knows that his master has gone far away to do something dangerous.

But Loyard couldn't be there.

I couldn't keep up with Valerie, as she was destined to descend into unrecognizable madness every full moon night.

Does the cursed fate end up being the curse of the lord.

Ellen doesn't know what Loyar is talking about.

However, I put Adriana down and summoned Rament again, who took it in his stride.

"My sister....... Why the hell. Ellen why are you......."

"Back off."

Ellen looks at Loyar wordlessly.

The night of the full moon is upon us.

-Woodeddle

"Kr....... krr......."

His muzzle lengthens, and white fur begins to sprout all over Loyar's body.

Adriana's complexion went white at the sight, and Ellen gritted her teeth.

"Lycan....... Slope......."

A white beast that appeared in the Demon Attack.

Lykanslope.

The evidence could not be clearer.

After a long, long road.

Piecing together the many past events that have happened.

Finish.

Ellen arrived at a simple answer.

"......."

A tear falls from the corner of Ellen's eye.

"Uh, un....... un......?"

Adriana knew what she had been told as she watched Loyar transform into a lycanthrope.

Why Loyar was away for days at a time.

Today is the night of the full moon.

The being to whom I gave my heart and trusted, was not human.

-Woodruff

"Grrrr......."

When Ellen sees Loyaar transformed into a white beast, she doesn't even bother to wipe the tears from her eyes.

"No, no, no...... no, no....... This, this, why....... What the hell......."

Adriana is horrified and frightened, and she starts to shake and sob uncontrollably.

Beat me.

Ellen knows what that means.

"You step aside."

That would have meant he didn't want to hurt Adriana.

The one who always beat himself up and initially tried to kill himself.

Ellen Artorius understands now what murderous intent was then.

If so, why.

Why.

Some questions are answered, but the answers raise other questions.

-croak.

The white beast's low growl lays low and dreary in the sewers. Ellen clears her throat as she watches the white beast reveal its true colors, its true self.

The white beast has lost its mind.

"Auntie......."

To Lykanslof, who crouches down and prepares to charge.

Irine's Hound.

No.

Irine Great River.

The white wolf there.

Toward the White Lotus of the Great River.

"It's not going to be the same."

Swordmaster, Ellen Artorius, pointed her sword.

Episode 434.

Quantum Maze can be broken.

However, we don't know if Akrich and Antirianus will be able to enter Akasha after that quantum leap.

The point is, I had no intention of letting them reach Akasha's entrance.

I'm not sure if I'll ever have anything resembling an edge against the Archmage.

The important thing is that Alsbringer makes you stronger when your opponent is stronger than you.

And Tiamata, a holy relic optimized for fighting the undead.

Plus an assist from Eleris.

With that, I will jump over two hurdles and I will reach the end of this story.

The gate situation will not happen.

The demon will quietly disappear.

I will spend the rest of my time with Reinhardt as my real name.

Extinguishing the seeds of chaos sown across empires and continents, one by one.

One by one, I pulled out the possibilities of disruption, both sown by me and sown because of me.

You will find peace of mind through peace in the world.

I still don't know how I'm going to untangle the many tangled relationships and lies, but I know I'll figure it out.

I'll have to give more thought to whether or not I should tell them the truth, and if so, how I should say it, since they will feel betrayed by the truth.

In the end, I realized it was best to do nothing, so now I'm going to clean up the mess and hopefully everything will converge to peace.

-delay

With that, Eleris and I opened the door to Akasha.

Long, long hallways.

Someone was standing in the middle of Quantum Maze.

As if you've been waiting for it.

"You're already here, Great One."

The old vampire was smiling at me, holding a skull in his right hand.

"Apparently, you already know everything......."

Just as we knew about Akasha, it seemed that Antirrhinus now knew about Akasha.

But first, the skull in Antony's right hand.

I looked at it and narrowed my brow.

"Antirrhinus, what is that?"

"Oh, you mean this......."

Antirrhinus tosses it toward me.

It's more of a roll than an attack.

-degurrrr

"Would you recognize it if I told you it was Akriti?"

A skeleton rolled to my feet.

"That's what we're looking for, the remnants and leader of the Cantus Magna. The skull of Lukren."

It turned to dust at my feet and disappeared. The skeleton never looked out of place as it turned to black powder and scattered.

"Antirrhinus, what do you want?"

At the mingled voices of Eleris's enemies, the old man shook his head.

"Sadly, everyone on the council is....... You misunderstand me, of course I understand, but......."

"......."

"Not really."

The old gentleman's smile was still unreadable.

"If there is, didn't I tell you about it before?"

"Pleasure."

"I'm ready to enjoy both your successes and your failures, so I'm fully cooperating with you."

"I only did it because, in that situation, I needed to hold Lukren's hand for a moment to find out what Akasha was and where it was. I had no intention of betraying you."

"So I knew what Akasha was, and I got rid of Lukren, which had become obsolete."

"So, I'm just here to find out where Akasha is. I'm not interested in the boring business of being a god."

Antirrhinus looked at me with a wry smile.

Fun.

That's the only reason you're cooperating with me, and you're not interested in having a powerful artifact like Akasha at all.

I can't believe it. But Antirrhinus is smiling at me and Eleris as if there is no lie.

"The world is interesting because it's unpredictable, that's how I see it."

"In my own world, where I can control everything and everything is going to go the way I want it to go, what's the point of being interested and having fun?"

"Being a god in some world is like being a kid playing in the sand, only a little bigger."

"Great One."

"I love the story of a child building a sand castle, and then the waves and tidal waves come crashing in and a storm rages."

"I love the story of the child who is desperate to defend the sandcastle they've built, and they cry and despair, and they either make something of it, or they don't, and they sink into a sea of despair."

"I want to see a story that's unpredictable, but fun to watch."

"But I can't stand the idea of a skeleton with delusions of godhood trying to extort the ending of that story."

"I want you to take Akasha."

"You don't look like you're going to give in to the desire to be a god. You look like you love something more human, something more emotional, something more mundane."

"I love stories about people risking their lives for something so insignificant."

"Great One."

"Greatly pleased or."

"Tell me a story of great desperation."

Antirrhinus bows to me.

Crazy.

That's all I could think of.

You figure out what Akasha is, you give it to me, and then you help me because you're curious about what I'm going to do after that.

My despair too.

My happiness.

I'm sure it's going to be a fun story, so I'm going to take pleasure in watching.

Elise bit her lip in disbelief as she watched Antony's sincere, yet insane, demeanor.

"The boredom of time has driven you mad, Antirrhinus."

"Didn't I tell you the other day, Lord of Tuesday?"

Antirrhynchus gleams in the vampire's eerie eyes.

"I've lived so long that it's strange not to be crazy."

I've done everything I wanted to do, and I have everything I wanted to have.

He didn't want to die, so he became a vampire, and he's been living for a long, long time.

So now, even the cravings are gone, and I find pleasure in seeing someone's joy or despair.

"Of course, Lukren's screams and pleas before he died were also good entertainment for me; what a futile death for an old undead man to die without fulfilling such a long-standing desire......."

"I couldn't contain my excitement just watching."

Antirrhinus sees me.

"Of course, I'm no match for the pleasure of enforcing it. The place of master of ceremonies is unworthy of an old hag like me."

Antony has been helpful so far.

With this level of insanity, I'd rather trust it. I have no reason to take Akasha and no desire to do anything with it.

I wasn't even angry at the spitefulness that crossed the line into snickering behind my back whether I succeeded or failed.

"Anyway, Antirrhinus, do you mean to tell me that you will be on my side?"

"Of course, you shouldn't trust me too much, because I can act for your happiness or for your misery."

The disgusting honesty almost made me gag.

Antirrhinus killed Akrich. With this, the lineage of the Cantus Magna was completely severed.

Antirrhinus was still bowing his head.

"If you don't believe me, you can strike me in the throat with that holy object of purity. Great One."

"......."

Unwilling to resist, Antirrhinus stuck out his neck.

I'm willing to give my life if I know I won't see the end of it.

Is it right to kill.

Madness is unpredictable.

Antirrhinus betrayed him at a crucial moment and made short work of the Akasha. We arrived first and learned the truth, but we don't know if he intended to keep Akasha.

We don't know the future, and we don't know what Antony is thinking.

However, Antrianus has been a great help so far.

Incomprehensible insanity becomes trustworthy when it crosses the threshold of incomprehensibility.

Someone this insane is unlikely to be reformed by lesser motives.

"......crazy."

This level of insanity.

I chose to believe in the madness of Antirrhinus.

Yes.

You crazy old man.

Let's go to the end together.

\* \* \*

Elise has decided to stay at Akasha.

Of course, we can't just let Antirrhinus into Akasha because we don't know what he'll do.

Antirrhinus killed Akrich, an untrustworthy but very dangerous nuisance.

I don't know where they'll stand with me and where they'll stab me in the back, but for now, they're holding my hand.

Antony is actually useful, and the only thing he wants from me is to have fun.

If a powerful being like Antony cooperates fully in exchange for being an audience member in my life, it's not such a bad deal.

First, we need to meet Charlotte.

And Ellen.

I wasn't sure how to explain the truth, and I wasn't sure if I should tell her about Akasha's existence, but I had to meet Charlotte.

Through Antirrhinus, I returned to the ecliptic by mass teleportation.

There was also the obvious problem of explaining how I had returned to the ecliptic after disappearing from Richie's grave.

How do I get lucky for fooling everyone so far?

Antirrhinus decided to go to Richie's grave and give the Vampire Council and the Black Order the details.

"Are you sure about that? They probably think you're a traitor now."

"I think it will work out somehow."

With a smirk, Antirrhinus disappeared into the shadows of the night.

Well, is it time for me to worry about Antony?

Walking down an alleyway on the ecliptic, I stepped out into the street.

If I succeed in hiding Akasha, I will now have to repair the damage I have done as a demon. And the affairs of the Demon Church, one by one.

We don't know if we'll actually have to complete Akasha and create another world and move the demons there.

Sarkozy would agree with that plan.

If I take my demons with me to the New World, and my ability to control them is stronger than it is now, I might even become a god of the New World.

If I tried to do that, Antirrhinus would think it was boring and try to kill me.

I walked down the street and stood at the entrance to the temple, crossing the gate as I always did.

But whatever.

There was a certain awkwardness to it, unlike anything I'd ever seen before.

Everyone.

staring at me.

Especially when I realize that the guards and other Temple Gate forces are watching me.

As soon as he sees me, every muscle in his body tenses up.

Vigilance.

And the question.

Plus.

Fear.

As I stepped through the gate and turned around, I was met with a bizarre sight.

Before I knew it, guards were standing behind me, blocking my exit.

And.

"......Bertus?"

Bertus, sitting on a bench somewhere, walks slowly toward me.

Why is Bertus here at this time of night?

The usual Bertus seems to be laughing a little too hard. The unmasked Bertus smiles slightly sinisterly.

However, the current Bertus is different.

It was Bertus, his face hardened into a grim expression.

His face was filled with a level of anger that even he couldn't contain.

Why?

"I, I don't understand."

Bertus looks at me, surrounded by articles.

"This situation, I, I don't understand at all."

Bertus looks at me and says

"Why on earth would....... you?"

Confusion, anger, and a sense of betrayal mingled in Bertus's mind, and he couldn't seem to make sense of it himself.

a.

Was it?

It felt like something was breaking inside of me.

Too late.

No.

In the first place, was it supposed to be like this?

Was it my destiny to reach the end of it all and end up like this?

Just one more step.

I wonder if not being able to take that last step was my destiny.

"Grab it."

At Bertus's brief command, they moved.

\* \* \*

His arms were tied and his eyes were blindfolded.

That wasn't all.

"I hear you're using the power of a spirit, gag him so he can't talk."

Bertus's simple instructions left me speechless.

The good news is that the only thing taken from me was the Flame of Hua Yao. The invisible Ring of Sarkegar was not taken, so I was still in Reinhardt's form.

Indeed, it was a tool of concealment and disguise, and the Dreadfind clan heirloom would not be able to detect a pat-down unless I removed it.

I was grabbed by the knights and taken somewhere.

Something is wrong.

I don't know the extent of his suspicions about me. But Bertus knew something.

I don't know where or how it went wrong, but I now have over 100,000 achievement points. I don't see how resigning can fix the situation.

Which building in the temple, and where it is believed to be deep underground.

-Bang! Bang!

I could hear the rattle of chains.

And when the blindfold came off, I couldn't help but notice.

It's impossible to resolve doubts by retirement.

-Crrr.......

Like me, he could see Lykanslof in a cage with a gag in his mouth.

Red hair.

No.

It was blood, and its original coat was white.

It was a white lycanthrope with seven armors of blood on its body.

-Bang! Bang!

The chained lycanthrope struggled, his eyes flashing with madness. But whatever chains he was bound with, they were only tightening, not breaking.

Loyar.

And full moon.

Even if I didn't know the specifics, I couldn't help but understand.

Loyar has been captured.

And Loyaar had been seen during the Demon's Attack.

"Need I say more?"

Bertus, standing next to me, asks in a cold tone.

Even if we don't know how we got here, the result is clear.

It was clear that I was one of the Devil's minions, or perhaps the Devil himself.

Although.......

Use retirements.

I know I'm the devil, but people believe me.

That they'll trust my intentions.

[This retirement operation cannot be performed].

I was destined to kneel before the mountain of lies I had built up for myself.

So that, again, was not possible.

Episode 435.

Temple, the temple of the sun god.

"......."

Ellen was lying in bed, staring blankly up at the ceiling.

"Looks like Reinhardt is back at....... I think he's back."

"......."

Charlotte, who had gone off somewhere to talk for a bit, came back and told Ellen that.

In her fight with Loyar, Ellen came close to death several times.

Even as a Swordmaster, Lycanthrope's power, unleashed by the full moon, was too much to handle.

Lement and Lapelt.

Without the two holy relics, we might have lost.

In a daze, Ellen succeeded in subduing Lycanthrope and dragging his body out of the sewers before he passed out.

The soldiers and knights who followed Ellen completed the rest of the work.

The priests healed him, but the fatigue that threatened to overwhelm him never returned.

Adriana was taken into custody.

I assured Charlotte that I had nothing to do with this, but you never know what might happen.

They pursued the truth, and after only two days, they arrived at it.

It wasn't hard to pick up on the clues scattered everywhere.

But dealing with the easy truth is another matter.

"Ellen."

"Yes."

Charlotte asks, not looking at Ellen.

"Is Reinhardt the....... the devil?"

Ellen stares up at the ceiling in silence.

Maybe not the Devil, maybe Reinhardt is one of his minions.

But a confession that was just a joke.

That's now the final piece of the puzzle.

All the arrows of doubt and suspicion were pointed at Reinhardt.

"Yes."

Ellen says, her eyes unfocused.

"It will, I'm sure."

Reinhardt is the devil.

\* \* \*

The temple was silent.

The arrest of the warrior Reinhardt on suspicion of being a demon was a highly secretive affair.

Those who knew a little bit about it were silent.

Then, the elite forces of the Empire, including Saviolin Tana, who had traveled to Darklands to search for the missing Reinhardt, returned at the call of the Empire.

That included, of course, the Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan and Herriot.

Herriot, who had been stamping his feet, his complexion white from the failure to find the missing Reinhardt, turned more than white when he heard the story of the Archduke St. Thuan, who had returned from an audience with the Emperor with Saviolin Tana.

"Moo, what are you talking about, Dad......?"

The Grand Duke of Saint-Antoine was not the only one who didn't understand the situation.

"It is very likely that Reinhardt is a demon....... His Majesty has told me."

"Uh......? What do you mean by that?"

It was something she'd never thought of, and though she heard the words correctly, she doubted her ears, wondering if she'd heard them right.

Archduke Saint-Thuan briefed the Emperor on the progress of Charlotte and Ellen's investigation and Bertus's final instructions.

She's not smart enough to understand all that talk.

But I couldn't believe it.

"There must be a misunderstanding....... There's a misunderstanding. It can't be, Dad. Reinhardt is....... Reinhard is a man. He's a human being. He's a human being....... So how can Reinhardt be......."

The Archduke gently picked up the flailing Herriot.

"That's right. If there was a misunderstanding, it will be cleared up."

"Yeah, something, there's a misunderstanding, obviously......."

Reinhardt's last words echoed in Herriot's mind in a faint consciousness.

'I wanted to save everyone.......'

There's no way that Reinhardt is the devil.

It can't be the devil.

But Herriot clearly remembered the presence at Reinhardt's side at that moment, an unidentified but powerful being.

Out of the corner of his eye, Herriot sees someone walking out of the Tetra, the central palace of the Imperial Palace.

Saviolin Tana.

Herriot watched as the pale-complexioned leader of Shanapelle left the Tetra, staggered, and slumped to the ground.

-Sir!

-Grooming!

Many of the knights rushed to their leader, who collapsed in a heap as his legs gave out.

The.

It was a huge question mark, suspicion, and shock on everyone's mind.

\* \* \*

I was gagged.

This was to keep his mouth shut in case he used the power of the spirits to say something stupid.

But because of that, I couldn't make any excuses or say anything to defend myself.

So far, why I did it.

The reasons for the things I've done so far.

I was not given the slightest excuse or opportunity to defend myself.

I did all of this to stop the Gate from destroying the world, and now that I've found Akasha, I've accomplished my goal.

I wasn't even given the opportunity to say that.

That I have the power of words.

My greatest superpower is now my worst curse.

Just as even the power of tongues given to me was a device to prevent me from saying anything in this situation.

I was unable to say anything for myself, or for those who would feel betrayed by me.

Trapped underground in the dark, I couldn't sense time, but I knew it was daylight.

Loyar has returned to his human form.

Loyar was locked in a cage across from me.

Loyar, gagged, looks at me.

"Uh....... u....... uu......."

Tears welled up in Loyar's puffy eyes.

I wonder if he thinks he's the reason I got caught.

Well.

I don't think so.

The accumulation of events was bound to reach a critical mass and explode at some point, it just happened to be at the wrong time.

I didn't know what I was getting myself into, but if this was what it was going to take, I might as well do it. This is what was supposed to happen, so this is what's going to happen.

Self-defeating.

That's what it felt like.

So I shake my head at Loyar, who can't speak, but is looking at me, wide-eyed and crying. At least I had the freedom to move my head.

Maybe it's your fault.

I don't think so.

I wonder if my heart was in the right place.

Loyar didn't stop crying, but he grew more animalistic and feverish.

Where is this in the temple.

Unknown.

However, the Empire seems to have decided that since I was captured in the Temple, it was better to keep me there rather than transport me to the Imperial Palace.

-jerky

Soon, the guards were replaced.

The knights of Shanapelle and the wizards of the Imperial Mages.

Immediately, those who left with me yesterday on a mission have arrived to spy on me, now an alleged demon.

As if the world had turned upside down in a single day, everything had changed.

Two cages.

Soon, I knew who was closest to me and who would be watching Loyar.

Saviolin Tana.

She stares down at me, chained to the cage.

She didn't seem to understand the situation yet.

"Reinhardt."

"......."

She calls to me from outside the cage.

"You're the devil?"

He's gagged and can't say anything.

Better.

Yes, I am the devil.

Or, in this case, lie about it.

I didn't want to put any words in my mouth.

Saviolin Tana stares wide-eyed at me over the bars.

"No way....... that you saved the Empress......."

"......."

Yes.

I can't help but come to this conclusion.

In the chain of events, it all comes down to me saving Charlotte.

We can only assume that this was done to keep the spirit of the ancestral demon alive.

In the name of saving everyone, every action I take to protect someone will be an arrow back at me.

I could understand in my head that this thought process was going on.

I couldn't help but feel hopeless and miserable.

\* \* \*

Naturally, I wasn't just trapped and watched.

"The dispel is not working."

"Yeah, well, if that were the case, it would be a spell that would break the moment you crossed the Temple Gate."

She must have deduced that I was changing my appearance. After hearing the wizard's report, Saviolin Tana stares at me.

"Did you use some kind of polymorph magic......."

Sarkegar's ring, which specializes in camouflage, was undetected by the wizards' magic.

Saviolin Tana looks at me still. As if she wants to believe that I'm really just a human.

But I know that my guardian is a lycanthrope who is clearly the devil's pawn.

And at the point where I have two holy relics, I can hardly be considered anything more than a minion of the devil.

Unless you were a demon or something, there was a perception that you couldn't have two holy objects.

\* \* \*

How much time has passed.

I wonder if the Council and the Black Order realize what I've become now.

What would happen if we found out.

With no real sense of time, I could see what I was about to face.

"Your Highness......."

I heard Saviolin Tana speak to someone, her voice filled with concern.

Soon, a human figure appeared in front of the cage.

It was Charlotte.

Charlotte stared at me.

"Open it."

"Your Majesty, no."

"Open it."

Charlotte only said that twice. Saviorin Tana finally gave in to Charlotte's strong will and opened the door to the cage.

Charlotte knelt in front of me, bound and gagged.

Charlotte looks at me.

I couldn't fathom the depth of emotion in his eyes, the depth of his betrayal.

Charlotte looks at me and asks.

"You've lied to me so many times, so far."

"......."

"So just this once, just this once, let's be....... be honest. Just this one time. Just this one time....... be honest."

Charlotte looks at me.

Even in this situation, they kneel before me, begging for the truth.

"You're....... right?"

You didn't ask what's right, but I know what you're asking.

Is this the same kid you escaped the demon castle with?

Am I the devil.

That's what we're asking.

I'd say no.

At this point, I'm starting to feel like I'm lying.

There is no escape, and the truth that I am the devil is a truth that must be revealed.

There's no way you're going to get off scot-free and go back to your old life without raising any suspicions.

So far, we've fooled Charlotte.

I've lied to Charlotte more than anyone else.

And now that it's all over, I have to tell the now tired lie again.

No.

I'm exhausted.

I got tired of piling on the lies.

I look at Charlotte.

If you lie this far, you'll end up feeling even more betrayed.

I felt that if I denied it, something even more irreversible would happen.

Too late.

I couldn't let the misunderstanding build any further.

-nod

I nodded, still gagged.

"You know I....... You know....... I......."

With her head down, Charlotte murmurs in a shaky voice.

I was crying.

"What the hell am I....... you....... What did I do wrong......?"

There is no such thing.

"Why me, why only me, why me....... Why me like this....... Did you have to bully me? Was I that....... Did you hate me? Yes, the Empire wiped out the Demon Realm and you're trying to get revenge....... I get it....... Did I....... replace....... To go to this....... How much I cared about you, how much....... how much I thought and....... You know how I did, and then I forgot you. Again, to the point where relying on you....... Was that your calculation?"

I wanted to save you.

"What did you want to do with the demon spirit inside of me? Yeah, it was weird, somehow. You asked me to take you to the Palace of Spring because you thought I was in trouble, and you showed up just in time to stop me from going on a rampage, and that was all.......? Because you're the Devil's son......? Because you knew what was going on with me from the beginning....... because you knew everything......."

I had nothing to say about the puzzle I was putting together on my own.

If it had a mouth, it could have said something.

I'm wondering why I didn't say something sooner, and if there's anything I can say.

Now I can say it, and you'll think I'm telling another lie because I've already been caught.

"If you married me....... If you married me....... you could have taken over an empire....... Did you even think about that......?"

Yes.

I can see how you could even think that.

You might think that my engagement to protect you was a plot by the devil to take over the empire by marrying a princess who was out of contention for the imperial throne.

Bertus was the one who proposed the betrothal to the princess, but I was the one who accepted.

I'm not rebuilding the demon world, I'm an empire-devouring demon who makes his enemies his own.

It was a plausible plan, if I do say so myself.

Of course, that was never the intention.

If that's the case, then Ellen, who prevented that from happening by becoming the Empress's Guardian Knight, becomes a hero to the Empire.

"If I....... so....... to you so much, so much....... wrong?"

I was taken advantage of from start to finish.

Since my escape from the Demon Castle. Meeting me at the Temple, getting to know me, my role as messenger, my treatment of Charlotte, and the many lies I've told will eventually be understood as part of my ambition to take over the Empire.

So there she was, in front of me, shaking with betrayal, unable to cry properly.

"You'd rather have killed me....... I'd rather you killed me......."

"......."

"Well, if you're going to make me more miserable than dead....... You should have just killed me......."

It was actually the devil who saved him.

I realized it was the devil, and now I had to rely on someone else, and even he was the devil.

You can't help but think you've been played.

"That must have been fun....... playing with me like that....... Me, not knowing anything and smiling at you....... crying in front of you, and all the times I did that....... was fun, wasn't it......?"

Charlotte looks at me.

Charlotte's vacant gaze bores into me.

"All those moments of trying to cling to you, not knowing you had enemies in front of you, not knowing you were being used, not knowing that....... Wasn't it ridiculous and unbearable?"

No.

I look more ridiculous than anything else right now.

It's the reality of doing something that shouldn't have been done at all, causing all of this, and ultimately causing the collapse of everything.

My now is funny.

"If you....... in the world....... I hope you die in the most miserable way in the world......."

Charlotte mumbles to herself.

"I don't want to be comfortable when I die, and I don't want to be in the bottom of hell when I die, and I don't want to be tormented for all eternity....... I hope so......."

Charlotte curses me.

What did I do so wrong.

Charlotte kept saying that in front of me.

That's what I wanted to say.

What did I do so wrong.......

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Helped to her feet by the knights, Charlotte staggered to the ground and found two people waiting for her.

Ellen and Harriet were waiting.

A temporary jail-like space to hold students who have caused incidents inside the temple.

The area was now being guarded by Shanapelle and the highest ranking mages of the Imperial Mage Corps.

Literally, it was so well guarded that not an ant could get in.

The makeshift camp where Reinhardt was now confined was even more guarded than the Tetra, the central palace where the emperor resided.

Herriot still couldn't believe what was happening, and Ellen looked calm.

Ellen didn't say anything, just that she didn't want to show it.

When Charlotte said she could come in with her, Ellen shook her head.

He said he wouldn't know what to say to Reinhardt if he met him. I denied it.

Charlotte says with dead eyes.

"Reinhardt, the devil is right."

"You're lying....... No, you're not. You're not. Why would Reinhardt......."

Her lips quivered, and she shook her head.

Charlotte didn't say anything to Harriet, who was in denial.

Ellen walked away, supporting Charlotte.

Ellen didn't say anything until the end.

Herriot stared at the camp where Reinhardt was being held, unable to turn away.

Reinhardt himself admitted that he was the devil.

Why.

Why.

When you say you wanted to protect everyone, what then?

Herriot stood there, frozen in place, for a long moment in front of the heavily guarded makeshift camp building.

"No, you don't....... No. No, Reinhardt....... No, it's not......."

Herriot mumbled to himself for a long time, as if possessed by something.

I had a lot of questions for Reinhardt.

What have we been doing all this time?

What the heck did they want?

However, Herriot couldn't even get permission to meet Reinhardt on his own.

\* \* \*

"......."

"......."

The Emperor, Neliod de Gradias, and the First Prince, Bertus de Gradias, sat across from each other, speechless.

Reinhardt.

The man I thought was the hope of the empire turned out to be the devil.

The actions you've taken so far to save Charlotte have actually been the Devil's way of taking over the empire.

"We've made too much of Darklands and the new demon."

"......."

At Bertus' words, the emperor was speechless.

"I almost sold the empire to the devil."

Even the engagement didn't come from Reinhard himself, but from Bertus.

So this is what it's like to be smoked out of your skull.

Without realizing it, I almost snatched up the empire and put it in the devil's mouth.

The warrior who saved Charlotte de Gradias time and time again.

That's why he allowed his betrothal to the First Empress, thinking it was the only way to ensure her safety.

But it was all in the devil's calculations.

Overriding his reputation as a warrior, he accomplishes so much that he overtakes the heir apparent to the imperial throne, Bertus de Gradias, and becomes emperor.

No, there was a way to make Charlotte an emperor.

They don't raise up crumbling empires, they consume them.

The emperor and the prince were in awe and astonishment at the devil's idea, for it was unthinkable that a culprit could have come up with it, and even more so that the plan could have been realized.

"With the power of the demonic realm in my hands, I could have created any number of fake achievements, even one for defeating a demon king, and placed it in my hands, and....... I might have been able to fulfill that ridiculous plan."

"......."

It was all a calculated move.

For planting the demon's spirit in Charlotte, for saving her just in time, and for convincing the imperial family that no one but he could calm her condition.

The kind of revenge that doesn't take down your enemies, but makes them your own.

Clearly, Reinhardt was able to realize his plan.

Bertus realized that even the emperor had a knife at the nape of his neck.

Bertus, as well as Reinhard, had invited the emperor to a private audience several times because of the importance of his presence.

If you wanted to disrupt the empire, you had the option of killing the emperor.

But I endured all those small moments of revenge for a bolder goal.

What transcendent endurance, mental strength, and willpower.

Not knowing the truth, they both recognize that Reinhardt's actions thus far have been in the name of revenge.

That's why they're both horrified by his momentum, which has allowed him to become the empress's closest confidant and even her fiancé in just over a year since he infiltrated the temple.

I thought it was a minor force that I could wipe out at any time, but the demon was right next to me, not poisoning me from afar.

Not by destroying the empire, but by growing the ambition to consume it.

"And when you consider that Reinhardt's closest friends were Ellen Artorius, Olivia Ranze, and Harriet de Saint-Hilaire....... I suppose it might have been possible to push me out."

The warrior's sister.

Saint of the Five Great Houses.

And Herriot de Saint-Étienne used his magic to stop the raining meteors, a feat that even the archmage could have accomplished.

Considering what the three of them could do and how influential they could be, their becoming Demon Men was a disaster for the empire.

Of course, Ellen Artorius played a key role in uncovering the Devil's identity.

If Ellen and Charlotte hadn't picked up on the demon's trail along the way, it's entirely possible that a demon disguised as a human could have consumed the empire.

It was Bertus, the emperor, and he was out of his mind in the usual way.

Because something unimaginable has happened.

"I don't know what to do with it."

But the most important question remained.

You've captured a demon.

But it was also the end of something, and the beginning of a huge headache.

First things first.

To announce to the world that Reinhardt was in fact the Devil or not.

"Aside from the reasons why the Demon was given the choice of two holy objects, that in itself is enough to cause a schism in the Church of God."

"Of course......."

The gods are right.

If so, it could be concluded that since Als and Tuan chose the Devil, the Devil is right.

"They could tell the story that the devil has stolen the holy relic through some nefarious means, or something like that, and the crowds might believe it, but it would still cause a great deal of turmoil within the Order of Als and Tuan."

"Demon worshippers are also a problem, and I'm afraid that some of the Shintoists might try to demonize them."

Bertus and the Emperor's faces were filled with sorrow.

It's also possible that some of the Shintoists will follow the Demon King. Then it was only a matter of time before the entire continent, if not all of its adherents, would be in turmoil.

"We could publicly execute the demon and announce that there are no more Archdemons left in the world to calm public opinion, but....... I think that would be too risky."

"I suppose so. We've got the demon, but not the rest of him, and as long as he's been able to infiltrate the Temple, we'll never know how far he's planted his forces......."

Two important issues.

I have no idea what the extent of the demon's power is.

Public executions are inevitably followed by a rebel takeover. The Archdemon's existence is so vital that any demon loyal to the Demon Realm will lay down their lives for the task of reclaiming it.

And a third.

The Devil wasn't just planning to swallow up the empire.

"It's almost certain that the events at Ritchie's tomb also involved demonic forces."

"Is that so?"

"The Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan was the mastermind of the last incident, and I understand he accompanied Dwyn and Richie on their search for the grave."

The Emperor had received reports from Saviolin Tana and the Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan, and had compiled their information.

"We still don't know exactly what happened, but it's believed to have been a fight for the possession of a magic tool named Akasha. Dwyndo mentioned that the owner of the dungeon was also named Akasha."

"Akasha......?"

"I don't know the details. From what I've seen of the situation, a number of high-ranking vampires and mages were present, and I believe it was Lothar Dwyn who knew of Akasha's whereabouts. However, one of the demon's forces has betrayed him and seems intent on capturing Akasha........ I don't know. Whether the Demon King failed or succeeded in securing Akasha."

"What is Akasha?"

"I don't know."

The Emperor shook his head and added.

"But from Tana's reports, it's the stuff that makes you a god."

It's the kind of thing that makes you giggle when you hear it, but the fight to get it has caused a lot of trouble.

The moon grows many times larger, and mythical, mega-scale magic.

If it's something that those beings would fight for, you'd be right.

"We don't know what this Akasha thing is, but we can't just kill the demon at this point. If it's in his hands, that's one thing, but if it's in the hands of one of his minions, that's another."

Just as the great Valier so foresaw.

No one can bear to see a weapon capable of destroying them in the hands of an enemy.

As Luna Artorius would say.

Not out of greed for Akasha, but out of fear of Akasha.

Once the empire learned about Akasha, they couldn't help but want it.

After all, at this point, the Demon would have to die at some point, but he couldn't be killed right now.

\* \* \*

Bertus made his way to the prison where Reinhard of the Temple was being held.

Reinhardt was the devil.

It made me suspicious of things I hadn't suspected before, and it raised a lot of questions.

However, there were questions that were answered.

It didn't make any sense to me at all, but what I couldn't understand, I now understood completely.

Female.

Reinhardt wasn't quiet to begin with.

But as if infiltrating the temple and keeping quiet weren't bad enough, the devil cross-dresses.

It was completely incomprehensible, and Bertus drew a simple conclusion from it.

Maybe the devil is supposed to be a woman.

In other words, she was a princess, not a prince of Darkland.

For now, it's clear that demons have the ability to shape-shift and disguise their bodies.

That's why he used Charlotte, who has the soul of a demon, and took on the form of a man to win her heart.

We don't know if he entered the temple to take advantage of Charlotte de Gradias, but he may have decided that it was more advantageous for him to assume a male form than a female one.

That's why I took on the persona of Reinhardt.

However, after being in the form of a man for so long, it must have been so frustrating that she wanted to return to her original form.

So I think she was expressing that inner need in a bizarre way by entering a cross-dressing contest.

Otherwise, Bertus couldn't see why a demon would enter a cross-dressing contest.

'When I think about it, I was closer to my female classmates because....... because of that?'

After all, it was a demon-human relationship and there was a sinister agenda, but if you consider that the female classmates hung out with him because they were more comfortable inside, it was not unreasonable for him to behave in a feminine way.

In the midst of his thoughts, Bertus was able to come to a conclusion about the Demoness, who had been tormenting him for so long with so little benefit.

The devil was a princess.

That explains everything.

He was plotting to use her to take over the empire, but deep down, he didn't want to forget who he really was.

Some.......

"......."

Bertus paused to think.

Episode 437.

The chains that bind the devil are no ordinary chains.

Essentially, chains designed to bind powerful criminals or fiends and similar things will block any magical attempts the captive might make.

casting magic.

Or disenchantment.

Or any kind of behavior that uses artifacts.

As such, he was unable to use any kind of power except his own physical strength, or psychic powers that he had no way of controlling.

And the many knights and wizards inside the prison would not stand idly by as the demon escaped.

Contingencies, tinkering with superpowers.

To prepare for the situation and hear the statement, Bertus was doing what he had to do.

-Pajik!

"Ugh! Ugh! Ugh! Ugh! Ugh!"

Bertus watched Reinhardt writhing in agony with his savior, Tana.

It's been about three hours now.

Reinhardt's eyes were bloodshot red, his whole body shaking, but he had withstood the magic without fainting.

-Bang! Bang!

-Ew! Ew! Ew!

And behind him, a gray-haired woman with a ponytail struggled.

They hadn't done anything magical, but they were feeling Reinhardt's pain as if it were their own.

Reinhard writhing in agony, the gray-haired woman weeping and weeping like an animal, writhing as if she felt her master's pain as much as her own.

How much time has passed.

Bertus watched as Reinhardt's body sagged as the pain ended.

The Archmage of the Imperial Mages, who had done so much magic, shook his head.

It wasn't worth the torture.

"Not a single mental trick is working."

"......Yes."

"I feel like I'm being protected by some kind of giant barrier....... It's as if you're under the protection of the gods....... I apologize, Your Majesty."

"Well, it's true that this guy was chosen by God. He's not wrong."

As long as we know that the demon has the power of speech, we can't ungag him. So we tried to break his mind, brainwash him, and get him to talk, but his spirit was strong.

As if protected by some great force, the demon's mind could not be penetrated or even cracked open.

"I'll ask them then."

Bertus pointed to the cage on the other side.

At that command, the door to the opposite cell opened, and Tana removed the gag from Loyar's mouth.

It was painful for Tana to see the tear-streaked trail of misery.

"What is Akasha?"

"......I don't know."

"That's a pretty obvious answer."

"......I don't know. I."

Loyar had been hiding from the full moon, so he hadn't been to Ritchie's tomb and knew even less about Akasha than the Empire knew.

"Let's see if your head is that hard. Go ahead."

"Yes, Your Highness."

The same psychic magic that had been used on Reinhardt was now being used on Loyaar.

-Pagic!

"Turn off ....... Ugh!"

Lyakhanslov's mental capacity was far beyond that of the killer.

But it's not the ubiquitous torture technician or inquisitor who's touching Loyar's mind right now.

Among the best mages among humankind, they are masters of the mental realm of magic, and have studied these areas exclusively.

An aging archmage who has no reason to dabble in the cruder things of direct torture, such as tampering with people's minds. He has mastered the magic of the mind, so to speak, that he has no reason to do this for the sake of trivial clinical data.

Loyar's spirit could not escape his touch.

"ugh, ugh....... ugh......."

Bertus asks in front of the gray-haired woman, whose mind has completely disintegrated, drooling at the corners of her mouth, and who is completely lost in thought.

"What is Akasha?"

"Infinitely....... collecting magical....... artifacts......."

Loyard tells the truth as he knows it.

"Collecting magic? I heard it can give you godlike powers?"

"I don't know....... I'm....... beyond that......."

Another keyword. Magic collection.

It's impossible to lie in this state of mind.

It's clear that this woman really doesn't know about Akasha.

Eventually, we need to ungag Reinhardt and get him to talk.

Bertus looked behind him, not at the gray-haired woman, who looked shaken and distraught.

"......."

While Loyard was being mentally tortured, Reinhardt was silent behind him.

But when Bertus saw Reinhardt, he couldn't help but be impressed.

Just as Loyard had wept at the sight of his master's suffering, Reinhard was weeping through his gag.

Those tears, they were red.

The pain, anger, and sadness that ordinary tears cannot express.

And despair ran through the corners of the demon's eyes.

As Bertus watched Reinhardt weep blood, he felt an intense, unexplained sense of dread.

\* \* \*

The gray-haired woman doesn't know what Akasha is.

So, in the end, we have to ask Reinhardt.

Bertus left the stunned gray-haired woman behind and stood before Reinhardt again.

Bertus stares at the tear streaks of blood that run from the corners of the demon's eyes down his cheeks.

What Akasha is.

It was a simple question to ask, but the power of an unidentified spirit was too much of an obstacle.

"At this rate, I'll starve to death before I figure anything out."

I couldn't give him water or food because he was gagged to prevent him from using words.

You can't kill the demon until you know what Akasha is.

At this rate, the demon will dehydrate or starve before we can figure anything out, but if we force him to speak, he might try to do something with his words.

Necromancy is a superpower.

This is why magic can't cope with or prevent it.

Words.

Superpowers.

What to do about it.

"......."

In Bertus's mind, the name of the person he needed most right now popped into his head.

Immune.

Scarlett would be unaffected by Reinhardt's words now.

If so, no matter what happens, Scarlett has your back.

\* \* \*

Scarlett, a second-year Royal Class B-3, has noticed that the atmosphere at Temple has been a bit turbulent lately.

Of course, I hadn't really noticed anything unusual. Stories of battles and demonic captures in the Darklands were highly classified, and rumors couldn't afford to get out.

However, the presence of far more Imperial knights and wizards than usual inside the temple, and the very somber atmosphere, were enough to make me realize that there was a dark cloud hanging over the place.

And best of all, a royal class atmosphere.

Charlotte didn't show up to class and wasn't even at Temple for some time, as if something serious was going on.

I don't know about Class A, but Bertus wasn't in class either.

But in the end, I don't know the full story, so I'm just going to assume that something is going on.

"It's ....... What?"

So, when Scarlett heard what Bertus had to say to her, she couldn't help but ask, "Why?

The explanation was long and wordy, but the bottom line was simple.

You've captured a demon.

And that's Reinhardt.

Scarlett couldn't believe her ears when Bertus, whom she hadn't had much contact with, said something so unbelievable.

Are you trying to make fun of me? Why? For what?

But Scarlett couldn't find the slightest hint of mischief in Bertus' expression.

Bertus was always subtly smiling and kind and gentle to all his classmates, even though we didn't know his true feelings.

But there was no way I could tell Bertus that I was kidding, as he spoke with a serious expression on his face, not the slightest hint of a smile.

"The point is, Reinhardt has some kind of psychic power that's hard to fathom, and what I'd call an interrogation isn't going well, so I need your help."

"ah......."

Scarlett couldn't make out what Bertus was saying.

But I could understand the implication that his immunity, an inscrutable superpower akin to a spirit, was necessary for the job.

Reinhardt is the devil.

You need your own help.

Scarlett nodded shakily, though she could understand nothing of what was being said.

"Yes....... If there's anything I need to do....... I'll do it......."

Bertus didn't add, but Scarlett understood enough to know that she wasn't supposed to tell anyone about this.

\* \* \*

Bertus didn't tell Scarlett more than she needed to know.

Reinhardt is the devil.

The Devil uses a bizarre superpower known as ghosts, so if he tries to play tricks on Reinhardt with ghosts when he interrogates him, kill him.

It was a simple and straightforward instruction.

Scarlett arrives at a building inside the temple, which is guarded.

With so many knights and wizards around, the area around the building had a vast radius, and it was impossible to tell if there was a restraining order in place.

Reinhardt is the devil.

Having been chosen by the Alsbringer, Scarlet had grown to admire Reinhardt beyond admiration. But such a being was a demon.

I couldn't believe it when I heard it.

Even as Bertus led her into the heavily guarded basement of the building, Scarlett felt numb.

What's going on.

I wonder if I should be doing this.

What in the world is going on?

Biting her lip to keep from being eaten by fear. Scarlett soon found herself in a prison deep underground.

Scarlett didn't know if the Temple had originally housed a prison or if it had been hastily constructed.

The basement wasn't a huge space.

But all the knights and mages in the room remained silent, including Xaviorin Tana, the head of the Shanapelle.

Each and every one of them was a human weapon, one of the strongest in the world, and they stood their ground as if they would not tolerate any intruders.

But they all remained stony silent.

In that stifling atmosphere, Bertus handed Scarlett the canteen and food he had prepared.

We can't let it die, so we need to feed it something.

Scarlett accepted it with a shudder.

This is where Reinhardt comes in.

Reinhardt, who turns out to be a demon.

Scarlett walked slowly down the hall with Bertus, carrying a canteen and bread.

Halfway down a dark hallway.

There were bars and prisons on both sides.

Scarlet could see two beings in chains that must have been magically reinforced, even if they were pretending.

A woman with disheveled gray hair, hanging down.

And Reinhardt.

We weren't exactly close.

He's a pretty tough guy, but I thought it was cool that he always stuck to his guns and didn't bend to coercion.

I longed for that.

But the being was now reduced to a wretched figure, chained in the basement of the temple, awaiting judgment.

Are you the devil?

Why?

Why?

Faced with a grotesque absurdity, Scarlet watched as the stern-faced Savior Tana opened the cage.

Reinhard looked at Scarlett and said nothing.

As if we knew that Scarlett was a duck.

What does the red blood running down the cheek mean?

I wonder if I've been tortured or something.

"......."

Scarlett's fingertips shook violently as she removed the gag.

Scarlet couldn't comprehend that the devil who ravaged the world and the wretched, miserable Reinhardt in front of her were one and the same.

-Took

The gag in Reinhardt's mouth dropped to the floor with a thud.

Bertus asks.

"What is Akasha?"

At Bertus's question, Reinhardt opened his mouth as if he had been waiting.

"Akasha is....... tool of creation."

"It originally belonged to Cantus Magna, but at some point Darklands came into possession of it."

"The former Demon King Vali used Akasha to create a new world, so that he and his demons could migrate to it."

"And Akasha exists in the labyrinths beneath the Demon Castle."

"But it's probably moved now, and you won't find it, and I don't know where Akasha is anymore."

"I lost all memory of living in the demon world."

"So, I didn't realize I had Akasha until now."

"You're probably wondering what I want."

"I, Stretch....... Stretch, peace....... peace....... I wanted....... Hmph....... Heh heh heh......."

"May the world....... May there be peace....... Hmph. Hmph....... I hoped......."

"I don't....... I don't hate people......."

"You guys....... I wanted to save you all....... really......."

"Believe it or not....... Believe me......."

"Please...... I'll......."

Reinhardt says with a wry, wry smile.

Having said all that.

As if he knew no one would believe him.

Unable to control the laughter that leaked out.

Tell the truth about everything.

"If you don't believe me, then....... You guys need to let me go fast."

Reinhardt looks up with difficulty.

"Otherwise, Akasha might be used to destroy the world."

The demon, his eyes bloodshot, looks at Bertus.

"If you're not going to do that, at least do a public execution."

Like a madman.

"Before things get out of hand."

Scarlet could only stare in disbelief as the demon let out a low, mournful laugh.

"Hmph, hmph....... Hmph. Hmph, hmph......."

Reinhardt took no water and no bread.

Bertus narrowed his eyes at Reinhardt.

"That's ridiculous."

Bertus looked down at Reinhardt, who had bowed his head after he had finished speaking.

"If you already had something called Akasha, shouldn't you have used it, and what the hell was going on in Richie's grave?"

"......."

"You lost your memory, so you didn't know? What kind of lousy lie is that, now, are you mocking me, Reinhardt?"

"......."

"This is what happens when you realize that the head that used to work so well doesn't work anymore...it doesn't fit anymore....... A lie that's not even worth thinking about......."

"......."

"Suppose Akasha is a tool of creation, and your father, who you don't even want to believe, used it to lead demons to migrate to the Demon Realm, and you, too, for peace. Huh? Let's say that's what happened. Then, until now, you were Charlotte....... My brother. What did you do to my brother, what the hell?"

-Bam!

"Ugh!"

"You've done too many things to convince me that you wanted peace, don't you think?"

Reinhardt gulped as he kicked Ming.

Bertus was not logically wrong.

If he already had Akasha, why hadn't he used it until now? There must be more to what happened at Richie's grave.

If the library in the basement of the Demon Castle is Akasha, why have we left it alone all this time?

And what has been deceiving Charlotte all this time, that she was doing it to take over the empire, when she really wanted peace?

I've lost my memory.

So I didn't know everything.

It's a lie that doesn't even make sense.

Now that Akasha was actually in my hands, releasing it before it could be used for destruction was nothing more or less than something I said when I was cornered and had nothing else to say.

"And the power cartridges and moonshine you had the Ministry of Magic make, you know?"

"Oh....... Yeah, that happened......."

Reinhardt laughed at that, as if he'd just remembered.

"I thought everything you've done in the Temple so far was bullshit, so I dug it up, but you said it was already made, and then you made up a bunch of excuses and tried to hide your accomplishments."

"Yeah....... I did......."

Haha.

and.

Scarlett stared in horror at Reinhardt, who was grinning from ear to ear.

"I'm sure you're using it somewhere to grow your army. Aren't you?"

"Not....... Not at all....... Not......."

"Really? And what other excuses do you have for doing that?"

Bertus grimly grabs Reinhardt by the hair, forcing his head up and meeting his eyes.

"This time, I want you to think and lie."

The dead-eyed demon meets the prince's eyes, which burn with rage.

"I, in fact....... I know the future."

"......."

With trembling, cracked lips.

Reinhardt says with a laugh that is a mixture of despair, self-help, and heartbreak.

"In the future....... So....... At the beginning of the first semester next year....... A catastrophe called Gate is supposed to happen, and....... And then....... half the human race, no, more than half....... are supposed to be dying off......?"

"I....... to stop that from happening......."

"But we don't know why it's happening....... I don't know why....... I don't know either....... But I do know that it happens......."

"Even if I suddenly said something like that....... no one would believe me....... So, I searched myself for a reason....... A portal to another world....... I wondered if it was because he knew about such magical things....... Or maybe I could go to the other world first and do something about it....... I did all sorts of things....... I had Harriet study dimensional magic....... That's why I did it......."

"Power cartridges and moonshine are....... That's it. If I don't fix this....... we'll have to fight....... I need to see some of the things they're going to make in the future....... Let's make them ahead of time....... Let's give them a power boost....... It was something like this......."

"I was assuming that Cantus Magna would have something called Akasha in their possession....... I was assuming that Cantus Magna had Akasha by then....... Cantus Magna....... So the Sobriety Hunters are a group of people who are driven by magic for its own sake......."

-Bang!

Eventually, Bertus, who hadn't heard, slapped Reinhardt on the cheek.

"I told you to lie, and now you're writing a novel. Now you say you know the future?"

"Hmph, hmph....... Hmph, hmph, hmph, how....... how did you know?"

Reinhardt looks at Bertus, wide-eyed, with a grin that is nothing short of sobbing.

"This is fiction. It's true....... This world. It's a novel I wrote. How do I know the future? I created this world....... I created....... I'm the...... creator of it, or something like that....... Heh....... Heh....... Heh heh heh....... But....... I don't know everything, I only know a little....... Such an asshole....... Creator....... That's me....... Heh....... Heh heh heh......."

"You son of a bitch......!"

Bertus, his eyes rolling back in his head, roughly drew the sword Scarlet was wearing.

-Thwack!

"Your Majesty!"

"Woe....... Emperor!"

"Get off me, you fucking dog....... How far will you go to get me......!"

Tana quickly restrained Bertus from swinging his sword at her, and Scarlet went white in the face.

"Let go, let go, you son of a bitch, you're still messing with me!"

"Your Majesty! No, not yet, not yet!"

Reinhardt was laughing maniacally, even as he watched Bertus lose his temper.

"I know it's true....... What can I do....... I know this is true....... What can I do....... Hmph, hmph....... Hmph......."

The devil sobs like a madman.

"So....... You don't and can't believe what I said....... So....... So......."

The expression on the demon's face was wiped from his face as he laughed like a madman.

"Kill me now, before it's too late."

Scarlett could only watch in horror.

Episode 438.

There was a grim silence in the room, and no one dared to speak up.

In the room were the five heads of the Lord Vampire family, including Antrianus, as well as Sarkegar.

Elysees vouched for the return of Antirrhinus, who had betrayed her.

Antirrhinus was not a traitor, but rather returned from killing the head of the Cantus Magna.

As for Akasha's whereabouts, Eleris offered minimal explanation.

Akasha is the tool of creation and is now in a safe place.

Per Valerie's instructions, Eleris had moved Akasha to a different location for now.

They were now gathered in the stronghold of Lerouen, not the castle of Epiax.

Epiax was no longer available, as many humans had been sent to investigate.

We all had a pretty good idea of what was going on from the trail of Epiax's collapse.

Radia Schmidt got into a fight with someone and disappeared.

They were informed of the current situation by Epinhauser through Lucinil, who informed them that the Devil was now being held in the Temple.

Radia Schmidt is presumed dead.

And the Demon King and Loyaar are being held in the Temple.

Eleris's complexion was white as a sheet.

"Your clumsy compassion has endangered the king, Elerys."

"......."

At the end of Sarkegar's day, Eleris had no answer.

Clumsy compassion.

Those little cogs made the mismatched pieces come together, and that's how Valier was discovered.

Sarkegar's shapeshifting abilities make it possible to sneak in, but impossible to bring out.

Therefore, only armed conflict is considered.

"The place where you are now being held will be more difficult to enter than the Tetra, the central palace of Emperatos. And any assault on it would require our few forces to enter the temple first. Is it possible for us now to penetrate the temple, and then by force to the dungeon at its core, where your Majesty is imprisoned?"

Neither of them answered Sarkegar's question.

You're not facing a shortstop, you're going into the infield.

That's impossible.

And there are other alliances, aside from the Houses of the Council.

"Is there any chance the Black Order could help us with this?"

At Sarkegar's words, Galarsh shook his head.

"The destruction of Cantus Magna was a condition of our cooperation with the Order. And now that Cantus Magna is long gone, there's no reason for them to give us any more help."

"I'd rather worry about them coveting Akasha."

The Black Order was not here now.

After the events of Ritchie's Tomb, the Council refrained from contacting them until after Akasha was secured, as there was no telling how they would react if they learned the truth about Akasha.

If anything, EpinHauser's reporting of the detention in Bali was an undue favor.

With the Cantus Magna matter resolved and the truth of Akasha not shared with them, the alliance is effectively over. Arguably, by betrayal on the part of the Council.

So asking for help because the Demon King has been kidnapped isn't going to work, and the Order is more likely to ask for Akasha than anything else.

Situations where you can't hope for help from the Black Order.

The only thing that exists is the power of the Vampire Council.

It's impossible to get your Valerie back.

Eleris, the one most responsible for this situation, could only stare blankly.

Balie is about to die.

Antirrhinus, who had been silent, smirks.

"Why not use Akasha?"

"......."

At that, Sarkegar's brow furrowed.

"Didn't you say Akasha is a tool of creation, and how does that help in this situation?"

"That's an oversimplification."

Antirrhinus looks at Eleris with a coy smile.

"Akasha is already a very powerful source of power in her own right. Now, I'm sure the Emperor and the Temple have defenses in place against that level of magic, so it would be difficult to resolve the situation with powerful magic, but....... Why don't you consider that it is a tool of creation?"

"......."

"It's taking the things that make the world, and using them a little differently."

"What do you mean, use it differently?"

"It's like making the world half-assed, half-assed."

Antirrhinus chuckles.

"Half a world makes a world......?"

"Akasha is unfinished, so if we go live now, ....... you'll be building something that's infinitely closer to the world, but not yet the world."

Eleris bit her lip at Antrian's explanation.

Antirrhynchus was never able to see and enter Akasha himself, but he was told about it by Lucren, the head of Cantus Magna.

As a tool of creation, I had to know how it could be used.

We've already heard about Akasha, its uses, and the side effects of using it incompletely.

"It's about making that world collide with the current world with a bang."

"Very big."

"The likes of which no one had ever seen or heard before."

"The dreaded....... There will be a catastrophe of epic proportions."

"Humanity will be thrown into chaos. Castles, bridges, and houses will collapse and be destroyed, and humanity will be in chaos."

"What then?"

"If the world is about to end, shouldn't all those wizards and knights who have been assigned to keep watch over the devil's side leave?"

"To save people, to save lives."

"We're trying to capitalize on that."

"We're going to take advantage of that, and we're going to save the day."

"They have to fix the disaster that has befallen the world, and they don't have time for us trying to rescue the Demon from their clutches."

"With most of humanity dying, or perhaps even destroyed by it, it would be as easy as seeing fire to rescue him and then rebuild the demon world."

"So I'm going to tell you."

"Let's use Akasha, but let's use it unfinished on purpose."

Antirrhinus watched with amusement as Elise bit her lip.

Galarsh, Lerouen, and Lucinil were speechless.

Sarkegar's eyes widened.

"Such a....... Such a way......."

Extinction of the human race.

Demon to the rescue.

The Rebuild.

They had the means to fulfill three of Sarkegar's wishes in one fell swoop.

"I guess there's no other way to do it, no, there's no reason to do it any other way."

Half the human race is gone, or so it seems.

Sarkegaard believes that if you have the means, there's no reason not to use them.

"But....... work?"

Lerouen said hesitantly.

It would be a disaster of epic proportions.

Even if you have a goal of saving Valerie, you can't make decisions like this so easily.

Lucinil looks sadly at Sarkegar.

"I too....... I don't want our Valerie to die, but....... Do we have the right to do that, to cause something like that....... even if it happens?"

Sarkeghar narrowed his eyes at Lucinil's worried words, too big a catastrophe to discuss.

"Humans have destroyed our world."

"They have killed the sons and daughters of the Darklands, enslaved and raped them, and now they seek to destroy our one remaining future, the last hope of securing it."

"They destroyed us, they stole our land, they stole our children, and now they want to destroy our last hope."

"Do you not think that we, or I, or you, have a right to destroy them?"

"Who started the last war, humanity or not?"

"Who the hell has the right to destroy humanity if not us?"

"They destroyed us, so shouldn't they be destroyed as well?"

They destroyed us, so we have the right to destroy them. At that, Lucinil bites her lip and looks at Sarkegar.

To that well-deserved hatred, Lucinil and Lerouen found nothing to add.

Sarkhegar believes that the sons and daughters of Darkland have the right to destroy humanity, so he agrees with Antrianus that Akasha should be left intentionally unfinished.

There's no reason not to choose it.

Even if the demon dies, humanity is doomed.

An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.

You have destroyed us, so be you destroyed.

That's not right.

It shouldn't.

We need to find a win-win.

To someone who has had everything destroyed, such talk is the dime-a-dozen hypocrisy of those who have never been in that position.

No one could say anything to the enraged Sarkegar.

"Sure, I can see where you're coming from, but that's not something you can do just because you decide to do it."

Antrianus smiled and spoke to Sarkegar in a soft tone.

"You are the only one who knows where Akasha is right now, and you are the only one who can enter Akasha."

Libraries of the Underground City of Demons.

Now the location has changed, but only three beings can enter Akasha.

Charlotte De Gradias.

Demon Balie.

And Elyse, the ancient archdemon.

Eleris stared at the table.

"......."

Sarkegar is unaware that Eleris is an ancient Archdemon.

But even if you did, it wouldn't make a difference.

A hornless Archdemon cannot be the hope of the realm.

"Elise."

"......."

"Take responsibility for your ugly hypocrisy."

"......."

Sarkegar's words left Eleris speechless.

Valier, who has worked so hard to prevent the Gate from happening, will eventually see it happen as part of a ploy to save himself.

Like fate.

Chasing a gate event causes a gate event to occur.

If you do nothing, you'll be left with the dreaded regret that nothing would have happened.

Eleris ponders.

Should we run. From the council. From everything in the world.

Or, you can kill yourself.

But. what if it does.

After trying to save all humans, Valier dies at the hands of humans.

He dies, not understood by anyone, hated and hated by all those he loved.

His last descendant, with good intentions, dies before he can accomplish a good deed.

Due to your own mistakes.

In return for being drunk on clumsy compassion.

If Valier dies, and Akasha remains hidden and silent, the world will go on as Valier intended, without the Gate ever happening.

Is it still good.

And that's it.

Your hypocrisy kills your last descendant.

If we can save countless beings by allowing their descendants to die, is it right to do so?

But that it was right, that Bali would have wanted it, that countless beings could have lived because of it.

That was the definition.

Is that how you masturbate?

"Elise, are you going to drink in the same hypocrisy to the end and give me this bullshit about every being in the world having a reason to live? Yes, every being in the world has a reason to live, a reason to exist, but remember that the children of Darkland were all such beings."

Sarkeghar's words were wreaking havoc on Eleris' mind.

"Hehe....... The Lord of Peace, who hates and shuns killing so much....... that you should take on this role......."

Antirrhinus's laughter tickled my ears.

"What a....... What a sad fate....... Hehehe. Heh heh heh heh heh......."

While listening to the maniacal laughter of an old vampire who is enjoying this situation so much he can't help himself.

Elise remembers one afternoon, long ago.

As always, it was a lazy afternoon.

No customers, sprawled out on the counter in the boring afternoon sun.

One lazy afternoon, I was just killing time.

The store door opened, and a boy walked in.

A boy who looked vaguely familiar, carrying a fireball scroll.

A boy who somehow had a scroll of demons.

When he realized that the boy was his last descendant.

When I realized it was Valier Jr. the Prince of Demons, who I once tutored for a few days.

Eleris believed that there was some kind of destiny for her.

When the boy said he was going to save the world, that he knew the future.

He believed that his destiny would save the world from destruction, that it would lighten the weight of his sins and murders.

But.

That wasn't it.

Your destiny is your own.

That was the last thing he should have been doing.

He had accumulated so much killing and sin that the hypocrisy he had built up to avoid it had pushed him over the edge.

To repay by murder, by hypocrisy.

Eventually, you'll commit a sin that no one in the world can forgive.

Trying to save everyone.

Killing everyone.

That was his role.

"......."

Well, it was my destiny.

Episode 439.

Of the current Temple sophomores, only four know that Reinhardt is a demon.

Bertus, Charlotte, Ellen, and Harriet.

There's a strict code of silence, no one knows what's going on, and everyone just knows it's weird. The story hadn't spread yet.

However, everyone was puzzled that Reinhardt hadn't been seen for a few days.

When asked where Reinhardt had gone, neither Ellen nor Harriet could say.

How many days.

Ellen didn't go to any of the classes.

I just sat in my royal class dorm and did nothing.

Right now, Ellen was sitting in the corner of the rehearsal hall, leaning back in a daze.

You have become a Swordmaster.

Miraculously, the youngest Swordmaster in history emerged.

Ellen Artorius' name will go down in history.

"......."

But whatever.

Ellen sat dazedly in the far corner of the rehearsal hall, her head buried between her knees.

What you get is strength.

And the truth.

All we lost was Reinhardt, and only one.

But Ellen felt like she had lost everything.

When I heard Charlotte's story about searching for the demon's trail, I didn't expect to find it.

It was like grasping at straws.

But within two days, I was able to get to the bottom of it.

The truth she wanted to know became the worst truth of all, and it stared her in the face.

What was the point of all the time I'd spent with Reinhard, from the beginning to now?

Reinhardt wondered what the hell he was thinking.

My brother killed a demon.

He couldn't have liked his brother.

After they had gotten somewhat closer, Ellen confessed to Reinhard that she was the sister of Lagan Artorius.

What was Reinhardt thinking then?

Given the seemingly unsurprised reaction, perhaps Reinhardt knew it all along.

She thought about it, but Ellen didn't know the answer.

Ellen had been instrumental in tracking down the demon, so if she wanted to see Reinhardt, she would be able to.

However, when faced with Reinhardt, who was now certain to be a demon, he felt he could say nothing.

Reinhard's betrothal to Charlotte was not by choice or anything else, but to take control of the empire.

Herriot created the Magical Research Department to create items to strengthen his army.

Then I.

What was I.

What did Reinhardt want for himself?

If the goal was to create this sense of betrayal and hopelessness, Reinhardt succeeded.

The man I loved was actually the son of the devil who killed my brother.

The Devil's son knew that, but he approached him anyway.

Well, that was Reinhardt's idea of revenge.

I thought you liked me.

You'll like me, I thought.

In fact, I hated him more than anyone.

I hate her more than anyone, and I want to torment her to death because she's the sister of the man who killed my father.

For the betrayal, deprivation, and despair you'll feel one day.

Had he spent more time with her than anyone else and misled himself?

How much do you have to hate to do that.

He didn't think for a moment that Reinhardt hated him, and he didn't get any indication that he did.

The demon is dead, and Darkland is doomed.

A demon who has lost everything, who has seen his world destroyed, has even less reason to like himself, let alone his empire and humanity.

Reinhardt never liked himself from the beginning, not even once.

I think so.

I think so, but.......

"......."

I feel like I'm lying.

I have countless moments and hours of proof that Reinhardt likes me and wouldn't have done it otherwise.

I think Reinhardt liked me.

As much as you love Reinhardt, if not more.

I think Reinhardt liked himself, too.

The look on his face, the words we'd shared, the memories we'd shared, couldn't have been a lie. There was no way to disguise those feelings and words.

I think so.

The reality was that Reinhardt had more reasons to hate him than to love him.

"Black....... ugh......."

With her face buried between her knees, Ellen sobs.

Reinhard would hate humanity.

Reinhard would hate the Empire.

The warrior who struck the final blow in the collapse of Darklands.

You will hate Lagan Artorius.

So you will hate and loathe yourself, your own kinsman.

All the moments you've had, and still have, that feel too real to doubt, must be false because they are.

Reinhardt hates me.

So why didn't he kill himself?

I'm sure there were plenty of moments where I could have killed myself by getting too strong.

There are plenty of ways to handle this without having to use your own hands.

Why have you kept me alive this long.

Why have you been watching me all this time.

Maybe it was because he wanted to make them despair more than he wanted to kill them.

Because death is too easy and too convenient.

Not to die, but to feel what it's like to lose everything, to be betrayed by the one you love most.

No.

For a very long time, Ellen taught Reinhardt the sword in a serious way.

Reinhardt has worked hard on his own, but he credits Ellen with getting him to where he is today.

Ellen, she taught the demon himself how to use a sword.

You've been taken advantage of.

I didn't realize they were enemies, and I taught them hard.

Was it really him who was supposed to teach the sword?

I don't know.

Ellen can't know Reinhardt's heart or the Devil's mind.

"......."

But Ellen cries.

Because you caught the devil by the tail.

Just like your brother caught the devil.

You've captured a demon yourself.

You'll make a name for yourself as a warrior brother and sister, but you'll go down in history for it.

It's all over.

Because.

There was nothing Ellen could do but cry.

-Woof

A sudden sound made Ellen look up.

Without even calling it out, something floated in the air in front of Ellen.

"Ramen......t?"

Floating in front of me was a summoned moon sword that I hadn't even called for.

Ramen is summoned, but he doesn't look like his usual self.

The blade of the new sword, Ramen, with its eerie foreshadowing of the moon, was unusually alien.

Rament's blade was tinged with darkness.

No, it wasn't darkness.

Ellen could see twinkling lights shining in the blackness of the common laments.

It's not dark.

Like a slice of the night sky, Ramen's sword was projecting the night sky.

Night, or part of the void in space.

That's what was being projected onto Ramen's kenshin.

"What......?"

Ellen clutched at the ramen as it floated through the air.

The dull blackness was a clear projection of fading starlight, space, and galactic fragments.

The condition for laments is tears.

Soon, sadness.

Ramen responded to Ellen's sadness.

The true power of ramen, a relic of the moon god Mensis.

A shard of night, in the form of a sword.

Ellen stared blankly at the Void Sword Ramen.

\* \* \*

Ellen and Charlotte were devastated, and neither of them showed up for Temple classes, too overwhelmed to even lick their wounds.

Bertus was trying to deal with the situation in his own way, trying to minimize the damage and gather any remaining clues of discord or doom.

The demon told him to kill himself.

But we don't know what the Demon's death will bring, and Akasha's whereabouts are unclear.

So Bertus was spending what seemed like an eternity with his hands tied, unable to use them.

Everything Reinhardt has done so far is reinterpreted under the premise that Reinhardt is the Devil.

I've gotten close to Ellen and Charlotte for revenge.

I used Ellen to hone my sword skills.

He wanted to use Charlotte to take over the empire.

The development of the Power Cartridge and Moonshine were intended to strengthen his army.

If so, the last.

"Dimensional magic research is....... What the hell was that......."

Bertus said as he sat Herriot down in front of him.

Herriot looked just as desperate.

Bertus was hanging out in the upper floors of the camp building where Reinhard was being held.

It was a dangerous place, but it was important, and that's why Bertus couldn't leave.

So Bertus was stationed here, being briefed on what was going on, and calling people in to tell him what he needed to know.

In the basement of this building is Reinhardt.

In the upper office, Herriot and Bertus sat across from each other.

There must be some misunderstanding, but it is clear that Reinhardt is a demon. His appearance has been altered by some sort of magic.

Reinhardt's own confession, as well as the look in Lykanslof's eyes and expression when he was captured, and the way he screamed whenever violence was inflicted on Reinhardt, were more than enough evidence.

Reinhardt is the devil.

Herriot can't deny it now.

So what was all that talk about protecting everyone?

Was it just a lie to keep things confusing until the very end?

Herriot, unsure of himself, answered all the questions Bertus had asked so far.

It was Herriot who said something about power cartridges and Moonshine's gun.

Bertus had asked about the work of the Ministry of Magic, and he felt he couldn't lie anymore.

Considering that much of Reinhardt's work has been part of the rebuilding of the Darklands and revenge against humanity, there's a lot to the story.

But dimensional magic research.

The dimensional magic research that Reinhardt was so strangely obsessed with is a mystery to me.

"It was a suggestion you made at the beginning because you wondered if there was another world?"

"......Yes."

Otherworldly.

It was just so out of left field.

But Herriot was intrigued, so he began to investigate, eventually gaining access to the Imperial Ministry of Magic's research archives.

This led me to research warp gates rather than otherworldly portals.

"What the hell was I going to do with this world?"

It's not just that it doesn't make sense, it's that it's too far-fetched for a demon to do.

Although he dismissed it as bullshit, Reinhardt had told Bertus about the gate situation.

Something called the Gate Crisis opens, and most of humanity dies.

I tried to stop it.

Of course, Bertus didn't believe it.

I searched the world for a way to stop the gate.

If that statement is false, what do you really want?

Is it really true that I forgot about Akasha?

And Dwin as a mage of Cantus Magna, whom Herriot had met at the Imperial Institute of Magic.

His whereabouts are unknown at this time, but it is now clear that he has ties to Akasha.

"I guess it comes down to that Akasha thing again......."

Dwin called Akasha an object that could become a god.

Reinhardt called it the instrument of creation.

If you can create a world with the tools of creation, it makes sense that you would be a god if you could create that world at will.

The Ancestor Demon Balie had created a world through Akasha and tried to migrate demons to it.

But Reinhardt had Akasha and didn't realize it until now.

I didn't know what was true and what was false.

However, the demon told him to kill Akasha before she could be used for destruction.

If you're going to give up your life so easily, what have you built up to this point?

"I....... I want to believe in Reinhardt......."

With her lips pursed, Harriet speaks in a desperate voice.

Even though she knew she shouldn't have said that, she covered her face with both hands, fuming.

I want to trust Rheinheit.

Bertus understood how Herriot felt.

How nice it would be if Reinhardt was actually just a nice guy.

But that's not possible.

"Saint-Thuan."

"ugh, ugh......."

"I hate to say this, but would you listen to me?"

"Yeah....... What do you mean?"

"I am your father....... I killed the Archduke of Saint-Thuan and pushed the entire Duchy of Saint-Thuan out of existence, killing and slaughtering the people who lived there, even taking them as slaves and selling them."

"......?"

Herriot froze at the sudden outburst.

Bertus taps his fingers on the table with a stern expression.

"And, here's a button."

"If you press this button, you can give me back what you've been given."

"The empire is destroyed, everyone in the imperial family dies, and everything in the empire is lost."

"You, are you confident that you won't push that button?"

At that, Harriet bit her lip.

Reinhard is a demon, and humanity has taken everything from him.

If you love to hate, and you have a device for realizing that hate through destruction, there's no reason why it shouldn't work.

It's impossible for a demon to love humanity.

It's not logical for the devil to want peace.

Reinhardt is the devil.

That's why it hates humanity.

So it's impossible to trust Reinhardt.

As Bertus said, Herriot thinks of it as his own case.

My father and his entire family were murdered, everyone in the duchy was killed, and the country was wiped out.

The last royalty of the country that did.

What would Herriot de Saint-Ouen do in such a situation?

They will go crazy with revenge.

I'm sure they'd do anything to pay you back.

In my case, I know I'm going to do that just by thinking about it.

That's what the devil did to mankind. It's no wonder he hates us.

So, if you want to believe Reinhardt, it's a foolish wish, out of context.

In front of Bertus' stern face, Herriot couldn't say anything about wanting to trust Reinhardt.

But.

Nevertheless.

"Bam.

Then.

'No matter what happens in the future....... just remember this one thing.......'

I heard in my dim consciousness.

Reinhardt's words.

Herriot still says it.

I wanted to believe it.

'I wanted to save everyone.......'

Reinhardt's words seemed to foreshadow a sad fate.

The desperation in those words.

Herriot wanted to believe.

Episode 440.

After Herriot returned, Bertus sat in his office, contemplating.

The demon looked like he'd rather die.

He said this could lead to bigger problems.

Why?

Wouldn't it be better to use Akasha to survive?

Why the devil.

Pretending to care about humanity.

It destroyed their world, killed their father, and if Valier truly died for that purpose, then Valier must hate humanity.

The Devil has no reason to care about the well-being of humanity.

There is nothing like that level of forgiveness and reconciliation in the world.

Balie's statement that he wants peace is therefore necessarily false.

In fact, it's entirely possible that everything you hear about Akasha is a lie.

To kill the devil or not to kill the devil.

Once Akasha is in the hands of the Devil's minions, and they attempt to use it to recapture the Devil, some unforeseen disaster is bound to occur.

Akasha is used by the Devil's minions to reclaim the Devil.

So, if you kill the Demon, will his minions, who have lost hope, not use Akasha?

It can't be.

If things go that way, Akasha will be used to avenge the dead demon.

In any case, Akasha is used.

There is only one way for Akasha not to be used, and that is to release the demon.

But what if an unleashed demon uses Akasha to destroy the world?

That's the worst possible ending for humanity.

If the stories about Akasha are true.

It's also true that I lost my memory and didn't know anything until now.

It's also true that we know the future.

And it's also true that there's this huge catastrophe with the gate thing or whatever.

Is it also true that the Devil was trying to stop it for the good of humanity?

It's too much to ask to believe such a lie.

The Devil has built up so many lies over the years that we can't trust anything he says in this situation.

Should the demon be killed, spared, or set free?

Bertus felt lost, at a crossroads where nothing could be the right answer.

\* \* \*

Olivia Ranze has returned to the ecliptic.

It's been a long time coming, and we're just about to wrap up our investigation of the Demon Gods.

In the southern part of the continent, in the Gelkorgis Desert, a number of cities that had become so desertified that their inhabitants had abandoned them, were strongholds of the cult.

With a vast area of desert uncharted territory, it was only natural that the headquarters of the Demon Gods would be located in a place where ordinary people couldn't go.

Olivia's immense divine power was an identification card and a ticket in itself.

Olivia's original intention was to kill the Demon King that the cultists were following, should he ever show himself.

But the demigods knew nothing about the demon king. They had no real contact with the Demon, except to say that he represented the will of the gods.

Knowing that they were merely followers of the Demon Lord, they could only hope that the last attack on Raziern by the Demon Cultists was not the work of the Demon Lord.

Killing the demon directly was out of the question, so Olivia decided to do the next best thing.

A complete wipeout of the cultists, who may turn to the devil's side at any moment.

It was something she couldn't do alone, so Olivia returned to the ecliptic.

I was going to lead the main body of the Crusader Knights and wipe the desert of Gelkorgis clean.

This was a good time to do it, as the situation would be even more troublesome once the demon had made full contact with the cultists.

On her return to Huangdao, Olivia encountered something strange.

"Olivia Ranze, follow me for a moment."

Before Olivia could reach the Crusader headquarters, Imperial knights blocked her path.

\* \* \*

Olivia was led into the Temple by the Knights, not by the Crusaders' headquarters.

I had come to the temple to catch a glimpse of Reinhardt's face, so it didn't change the fact that I had come to the right place, but it felt a little strange to be dragged there.

And Olivia felt a little weird.

Of course, it's the times they are a-changin', but the atmosphere inside the temple seemed overly rigid.

Most of the people coming and going were not students, and there were more armed troops than usual.

The knights and wizards escorting Olivia didn't look like anything out of the ordinary, either.

Inside the temple, in a counseling room in the General Headquarters.

I couldn't help but feel like I'd been dragged into an interrogation room, and soon someone entered.

A knight of Shanapelle, whom I had seen during the raid on Rizaira. Scotra Kelton sat down in front of Olivia.

"I told him not to use coercive means, but I'm not sure how that went."

Olivia stared at the stern-faced, middle-aged driver.

"It wasn't coercive, but....... What? Did I do something wrong?"

The strange atmosphere made Olivia blunt.

Now that you've pinpointed the location of the cultists, you've done no wrong and have done the Empire a great favor. Of course, we haven't seen it yet.

At Olivia's words, Scotra Kelton shook her head.

"No, that's not true at all, we trust her, but due to some important facts that have recently come to light, she needs a lot of attention and care."

"Important facts?"

"......."

Scotra Kelton stares at Olivia for a moment.

Like you're pondering something deeply.

"Ms. Olivia, would you like to summon Tiamata?"

"......?"

As if she could do anything, Olivia summoned Tiamata and set her down on the table.

"You are sharing Tiamata with Mr. Reinhardt, is that true?"

Scotra Kelton saw Olivia holding and wielding a tiara that should have belonged to Reinhardt during the Lizaira incident.

"Yeah, you saw that."

Olivia narrowed her eyes, as if to ask why she should know. Scotra Kelton nodded stiffly at Olivia's reaction, which was slowly becoming more than a little irritated.

"Mr. Reinhardt turns out to be a demon."

"Is that ......?"

Olivia couldn't help but panic as she suddenly heard something that didn't make sense.

What did I just hear?

Even when I thought about it word by word, I couldn't figure out what I had just heard.

But Scotra Kelton didn't elaborate.

"Therefore, Miss Olivia, who is soul-bound to the devil, must be judged as a person of interest."

"No, I'm asking you what you're talking about!"

"Ms. Olivia, I believe you are innocent, but....... I am recommending that you stay here at the General Headquarters until the situation has calmed down."

"What......?"

"Please, Ms. Olivia....... We don't want to do this either."

Scotra Kelton left the consultation room.

Olivia froze, unsure of what the hell was going on.

\* \* \*

Olivia soon left the counseling room and was led by the knights to one of the staff quarters in the General Headquarters.

It was like a horse's imprisonment. It wasn't just Olivia who lived in the quarters, but Shanapelle's knights as well.

It was clear they were watching in real time.

"What, I'm not supposed to know what's what, I'm supposed to know the context, and what am I supposed to do if you just throw out Reinhardt as the devil?"

It's not Scotra Kelton who's being kept under guard, but a member of the Knights of Shanapelle, the Empire's most powerful knightly order.

So it was clear that there had to be someone who could take out Olivia in a pinch, and it wouldn't be just one person.

The Knight of Shanapelle stares at Olivia with a stern expression.

"Quite literally, Olivia. Reinhardt, the holder of Alsbringer and Tiamata, was a demon who infiltrated the Temple, which was recently discovered and is currently imprisoned within the Temple, and discussions are currently underway to determine his treatment."

It was a longer explanation than Scotra Kelton's, but Olivia still couldn't make sense of it.

"And in light of the fact that Miss Olivia was rescued by demonic forces during the last death of Leviathan Lance, but has kept that fact a secret until now, and that you are sharing Tiamata with a demon, albeit of your own volition, the Empire has deemed it necessary to keep an eye on her."

"......."

"Miss Olivia, if you can just behave yourself for a few days, everything will be fine."

After all, it's possible that Olivia isn't the Devil's Kinnapool, but the Empire wants to keep her under surveillance because of the possibility.

Until the demon's disposition is determined.

Olivia swallowed hard.

Something.

It was clear that something very strange was going on, and most of it didn't even make sense to Olivia.

But one sentence stuck in my head.

Reinhardt was the devil.

So you're bound to be suspicious of yourself sharing a tiara with a demon.

Also, that he was present at the time of the murder of Levi Lance, but has kept it a secret until now.

That's why they're suspected of being in cahoots with the devil.

Olivia could only guess at how she got there.

"Reinhardt is....... Demon......?"

The single truth.

Once she accepts that, all the scattered puzzles that have been complicating Olivia's life come together.

That day, Olivia couldn't understand the demon's behavior, and it bothered her.

Why it saved me.

He was going to kill Leviathan, but he saved himself, an outsider. Why?

Why would raiding a nameless order do anything but good for the empire?

Olivia has been confused all this time because she doesn't know the demon's true intentions.

But Reinhardt was the devil.

If so, everything makes sense.

To protect yourself.

There was no other reason than that.

Somehow, Reinhardt knew Olivia was in danger, which is why he led his forces to attack Leverier Ranze.

The nameless order meant nothing to him, nor did Levereer Ranché itself.

It was a story where Olivia and Adriana were in danger and I only saved them because they were in danger.

The final piece of the puzzle was put together.

Demon and Reinhardt.

If they were the same, I could understand and accept the whole situation.

If the attack on Raziern by the Demonists was the work of the Devil, then the Devil must be evil, or so I thought.

But Olivia now realizes that the Satanists don't actually have much to do with the Devil.

Not selected.

Reinhardt won't look at me.

Always looking elsewhere.

I tell you how much I care about you, but you always turn me away.

That sucks.

That's what I was thinking.

It wasn't.

Reinhardt has already saved himself by taking a very big risk.

It was the same the first time, and it was the same this time.

Reinhardt redeemed himself twice.

"......."

What was it about you that said I'd do anything for you, even when you weren't looking at me.

I'm on your side, even if you don't choose me.

Unbeknownst to her, Reinhardt had already saved her. Risking his life, he mobilized a small force to take on the elite Paladins.

I even risked being found out.

While she verbally vowed to save Reinhardt, he actually saved Olivia, and hasn't been the least bit shy about it since.

On that subject, I was getting a little nervous.

I've been cringing at the subject.

On that subject, I whined about not being seen.

Olivia stood frozen, her mouth agape.

What a shame.

How ridiculous.

How I felt bad for myself every time I grumbled.

I would have been devastated because I wouldn't have been able to reveal the truth.

When Olivia realizes what Reinhardt has sacrificed for her, she realizes that Reinhardt is the devil and that it's probably a good thing.

If anything, it hardened Olivia's heart as the incomprehensible began to make sense.

What he said then.

From there, one part is now untenable.

Because Reinhardt was the devil.

The devil can't hurt Reinhardt.

No matter what.

Even if the world is upside down.

Even if the world is trying to hurt you.

No matter what.

I decided to keep Reinhardt.

The world wants to kill Reinhardt, the devil.

"......."

Therefore, Olivia must protect him. Olivia stares at the silent knight of Shanapelle.

She was staring at Olivia.

The Empire is suspicious of Olivia. She might be on the Devil's side.

Not until now.

Olivia is neither human nor demonic, but only Reinhardt's side.

Reinhardt is trapped somewhere in the temple.

We don't know why, but the Empire isn't going to kill him right away.

A few days of grace.

But for now, Olivia can't get away from Knight Chanapelle and the watchful eyes that have been placed on her.

So they can't break through Reinhardt's cage, which is sure to be more heavily guarded.

It will be a dog's death.

I could risk my life for Reinhardt, but I didn't want to take the chance that neither he nor I would die.

You have to put your life on the line for something that has even the slightest chance of working.

You can't save Reinhardt alone.

If so, you're not alone.

Reinhardt.

Just make sure you're not alone.

"Summon the Crusader Captain."

"......Yes?"

At Olivia's words, Knight Shanapelle of the Watchtower shook his head.

"As the Champion of Tuan and the one responsible for the future of the Five Great Houses, I must report this matter to the Houses and talk to them about their response and position on this situation... now."

"Miss Olivia, what are you talking about......."

"You are not detaining a Temple student. You're exerting political pressure on the Champion of Tuan, who represents the will of the High Priestess."

"What are you talking about, Miss Olivia. This is....... problem, isn't it?"

"He's the chosen champion of Als and Tuan, and we're going to have to do some doctrinal interpretation and inquisition about that, and we're going to have to get all the great houses of worship together to talk about whether there's any sense in the gods choosing him, or whether there's some nefarious machinations involved."

Olivia wants to politicize this work.

It's not about humanity vs. demons.

It's a matter of gods and men.

"You can silence me, but you'll have to bear in mind that keeping me here will cause a great deal of discord between the Empire and the Church of the Lord later on."

If you do not allow me to report this to the Church, you may have to go to war with us in the future.

"So get me a crusader, before I try to get out of here on my own two feet."

that I will make it so.

Olivia was saying it with her eyes.

"And I can't take on all of you. If you think you can't get away with anything......."

Olivia stares out the window, a sour look on her face.

"That's a big miscalculation."

Olivia smiles grimly and looks at the fading knight of Charnapelle.

In her confinement, Olivia was threatening her opponent in reverse.

第 441页

"Holy shit....... Fucking asshole......."

Bertus gritted his teeth when he heard Olivia Ranze's story.

Reinhardt didn't tell the world that he was a demon, because it would have turned into a religious issue.

It was dangerous to leave Olivia alone when she might be the devil's pawn.

So it was best to keep Olivia under observation for now.

However, when Olivia Ranze found out the truth, she began her shenanigans.

"You're not even hiding your intentions to side with the devil."

First and foremost, Olivia's willingness to bide her time was too obvious when she started talking about the Inquisition and discussions.

It was clear that I was not going to stay ambiguous, but I was going to defend the devil.

Olivia Ranze has chosen to become an enemy of the Empire, if not of humanity.

"Kill?"

Bertus gritted his teeth at Scotra Kelton's report.

"I can kill it, but it's in the middle of the temple, and it's going to be impossible to do it without a fuss, and it's going to be a mess."

The General Headquarters is one of the centers of the Temple.

From there, a fight breaks out between Olivia Ranze and the knights of Chanapelle who are trying to kill her, and an unspecified number of people can't help but notice.

Olivia Ranze is even harder to kill than the Devil at this point.

The Crusader Knights and the Grand Master would be held accountable for the Empire's murder of Tuan's champion, and would be bitterly resented by the majority of Grand Master adherents.

It's too long to say that she actually sided with the devil and had to be killed.

People will only accept the simple truth: 'The Empire killed the Champion of Tuan.

Olivia Ranze knows the political and religious significance of her life.

Killing me will bring about a conflict between the Empire and the Cult of the Lord long before the death of the Demon King.

And the devil has not one, but two holy relics.

So it's a matter of religion before it's a matter of empire. So you can't keep the disposition of the devil to yourselves.

The Five Great Houses have far too much incentive to get involved in this case.

If left alone, Olivia will escape the Temple on her own and make her way to the Crusaders.

Then, Olivia Ranze will lead a large group of paladins to knock on the Temple's door. Let's discuss the treatment of the demon.

It's up to us to decide whether to kill the demon or save it.

Killing demons is no fun, and Olivia Ranze will threaten the Empire.

The real big accidents happen to honest assholes, Bertus had once told Reinhardt in his own words.

That's what I said when evaluating Olivia Ranze.

Crazy asshole trying to scream at whales to stop killing demons in front of humans.

Olivia Ranze.

It's just an excuse to say you're a great teacher.

This asshole is not on the Church's side, only the Devil's. He doesn't even try to hide it.

The logic should be clear.

Not one, but two holy relics.

If two of the five gods chose the Demon, then the Demon must be right. Instead of hating each other, let us all find a way to live together, and we will create bullshit with no hypocrisy, only the intention of saving the demon.

"Really....... I'm going to die......."

You can't kill it, you can't not kill it.

When the Empire begins to meddle in matters that they've tried to keep to themselves, the situation spirals out of control.

First and foremost, Olivia Ranze wants to make sure the Demon King doesn't die.

This would cause great confusion among the populace, so they would try to spread rumors among the civilian population that Reinhardt, a known warrior, was a demon.

Bertus felt like he was watching a dragon struggle to wreak havoc on an empire.

"Call Elion Bolton at....... for me."

"......May I?"

"What the hell. I'd rather see the Empire split in two by killing Olivia Lance, than have the Demon King's list grow a little longer. No, I'd rather have her alive to wage war against the demons, a thousand times better, because then the empire will be stronger, not weaker."

I'm getting tired.

For days, Bertus felt like he was being pushed to the limits of his mental capacity.

\* \* \*

Elayon Bolton has entered the Temple with an entourage due to Olivia Ranze's troubles.

Olivia Ranze is about to reveal information that should be strictly confidential, information that would wreak havoc on the world if it became public.

There is a demon who has been chosen by a holy object.

Humans.

What do you think about that?

Olivia was about to summon the leader of the Crusader Knights to speak with her when Elayon Bolton arrived.

"What's going on, Olivia?"

"Let's get out of here."

Now that she had someone to take her out, Olivia had no intention of staying locked up any longer.

"Miss Olivia! No!"

Shanapelle's knight, who had been watching Olivia, stood in her way.

"You need to stay here to talk. You can't leave."

With the Shanapelle knights refusing to give way, the Crusader leader and his entourage realized something was amiss.

The Crusaders knew something was going on in the Temple, but they had no idea what it was.

"Who are you to tell me what to do?"

Olivia smiled wickedly as she stepped in front of the knight.

"The Empire is not responsible for my welfare, the Crusaders and the Great Houses are. Templars? Fuck that. The Empire has no authority to dictate where I go or where I come."

"......."

"Blocking my path will be seen as a challenge to the Crusader Order and an act of anti-religion against the will of the Five Great Houses and their members across the continent."

Olivia says calmly.

"Get out of my way. Where the fuck are you standing in the way of a champion?"

I wasn't alone, the leader of the Crusaders was with me.

It's not Olivia's personal power, it's her symbolism and political standing.

As such, Chanapelle had no choice but to pave the way.

Every knight in Shanapelle watched in horror as Olivia Ranze walked out with a bomb that would shake the entire continent.

\* \* \*

Olivia Ranze explained the situation to Crusader Knight Commander Elayon Bolton.

Originally, he only had Alsbringer, but Reinhardt communicated that he was sharing Tiamata with Olivia.

Reinhardt with two picks for the Holy Grail.

And that Reinhardt is the devil.

So, we need to convene the papal hierarchy of the Five Great Patriarchs for an emergency meeting. A doctrinal conference, an inquisition, whatever.

Elion Bolton was understandably alarmed.

That should have been enough of a message.

I've left it to Elion Bolton to take care of things for the Order.

The idea of a demon being the owner of a holy object would be a huge shock to the entire Shinto community.

Priests and paladins will also be divided on this issue.

That's why Olivia started acting before the decision was made.

That was easy for Olivia.

In the main building of the Crusaders, he held a makeshift sermon that drew priests and worshippers.

It was a sermon from a champion of Tuan, so it was bound to be well attended.

Olivia didn't say much.

"The gods are always right. Right?"

At Olivia's blunt words, many in the room nodded.

"The gods arrange and plan everything, don't they?"

"So the gods' choice cannot be wrong, cannot be denied, and the grace they bestow upon us is in itself proof that they are right and a sign that they love us."

"It is clear, then, that beings favored by the gods are worthy of love, and that their existence should be affirmed. Just as we are the chosen ones, loved by the gods."

"The most powerful of such graces and proofs."

"Holy Grail."

Olivia summoned Tiamata in her right hand and held it high.

-Ooooo.......

The subtle holy light flowing from Tiamata overwhelmed some who gazed upon it, moved others, and touched others with the grace of knowing it.

"As the chosen one of these holy objects, I dare say I represent the will of the gods to some degree."

"Ladies and gentlemen, the demon that has caused such a stir is now being held in the Temple."

-Oh!

The words caused a very loud rumble in the hall. At a time when the name of the Demon King was feared by all, the news that he had been captured was enough to fill everyone with awe, admiration, and relief.

"Reinhardt, the new warrior, whom you may have heard of."

Olivia smiles.

"They say that the warrior, chosen by the war god Als, is actually a demon who has infiltrated the human world."

No wonder the admiration in the room turned to disbelief. Seeing everyone's stunned silence, Olivia continues.

"We don't know all the details yet. But the point is, even if he is a demon disguised as a warrior, it doesn't change the fact that he was chosen by Alsbringer."

The sudden onslaught of information was so overwhelming that the listeners of the sermon were dazed.

But it definitely sticks in your head.

A demon has infiltrated Inseo.

With the name Reinhardt.

And he was chosen by Als.

"Of course, it's also possible that the Devil has done some nefarious trick to earn Alsbringer's favor."

Evil tricks.

People who were confused by the all-encompassing word have regained some semblance of sanity.

It's also something Olivia shouldn't say when she's trying to save Rheinheit.

But that's the point.

"As to whether the Demon King was truly chosen by Als, the Crusader Knights and the Order of the Five Great Houses have a duty to prove it."

"Right now, the Demon King's recruits are in the hands of the Empire."

"But that's our problem."

"The duty and right to discuss and conclude that the Demon has been chosen by the gods and to determine his treatment rests with us, not the Empire."

"It is we, not the Empire, who must decide whether the Devil has been chosen by the holy relic, or whether, through dirty tricks, he has intercepted a sacred relic that should belong to someone else."

"From now on, I will be traveling to the temple to receive the Devil's recruits."

"I believe that it is my divinely ordained duty to determine whether the devil has been denied or pacified."

"In the name of the Great Lord."

"In the name of Tuan, god of purity."

"I, in the name of God, will judge whether he is virtuous or not."

A political maneuver to get the Devil's recruits delivered.

Olivia Ranze is starting to make a big splash.

An unspecified number of people take the seeds of chaos.

These will now germinate everywhere and wreak havoc.

\* \* \*

Olivia didn't just assert that the demon must be right because it was chosen by a holy object.

Such extreme claims are bound to provoke a moderate backlash.

It is true that the devil has been chosen by the relic. Therefore, there must be a discussion to determine whether it is right or wrong, and we must be the ones to lead that discussion.

Olivia's comment about making it our problem because it's our problem seemed like the right thing to do.

The congregation was confused, but Olivia prioritized action.

Olivia Ranze, who left the temple, returned about five hours later.

She wasn't alone.

She was accompanied by two hundred paladins, some of the finest of the Crusader Order.

The paladins were also in a bad mood.

The paladins were initially shocked that the demon had chosen the holy object, but they were also angry that the Empire had tried to do this in secret.

The paladins all agreed with Olivia Ranze that we should be the ones to judge the demon's recruits.

In front of the guards and shanafels blocking the Temple's entrance, Olivia stepped to the front of the group.

"You are fulfilling a sacred duty. Make way."

"The Temple is Imperial property, not a place where the Crusaders can drop in and out as they please."

"The gods created this continent, and all the land is in their favor. Since all lands belong to the Great Lords, there is no land that we, the enforcers of their commands, cannot go to."

Olivia spoke like liquid gold, as if she'd never decided to betray the gods.

"You are interfering in a religious matter of great importance to the Crusader Knights and the Five Great Houses. Step aside, and we will discuss the disposition of the Demon King."

"I keep telling you, you can't come in."

"I'll take that to mean it's okay to use force."

-Thwack!

Olivia menacingly drew the tiamaata she had purposely kept in her scabbard.

The paladins looked nervous as Olivia drew her sword, and they drew theirs cautiously.

The paladins were also nervous about Olivia's behavior.

Tuan's champion, Olivia Ranze, is crossing the line.

Combine that with the Temple's forces, and things could spiral out of control. Whether Olivia's actions are right or wrong, she's officially brought the Great Patriarchate and the Empire into conflict.

The stabbing at the entrance to this temple may even be remembered as the start of a religious war.

That's why the Temple's guards, and even the paladins who followed her, were weary of Olivia Lance's honest madness.

Because no one thought she would go this far.

"Champion. For more information, visit......."

As such, one of the paladins who followed Olivia gulped and almost tried to discourage her.

"Now, are you doubting my meaning?"

To go against my will is to go against Tuan's will.

Even if I were a fellow Crusader, do you think I wouldn't have my head blown off against my will, Olivia asked, her eyes telling me so.

Olivia Ranze was now showing the Champion of the Gods just how crazy she could get, and the logic she could use to turn things around.

The Great Unwashed.

Holy Grail.

Congregational turmoil and religious wars.

Give it to me.

They're just pretending to be.

This could lead to a religious war that would tear the Empire apart, or it could be the beginning of a great war and carnage that would shake the entire continent.

Olivia doesn't know any of that.

The world.

Humanity or whatever.

Whether you're screwed or not is none of Olivia's business.

Olivia Ranze tries to save Reinhardt.

So, he'll get rid of what's in his way.

Even if it's God himself.

"Get out of the way, if you don't want to go to war."

Olivia's murderous words caused the guards and the paladins who followed her to hold their breath.

Honest insanity.

The worst thing it could show was about to happen, and it was happening now.

Episode 442.

It's been said that we don't avoid things because they're scary, we avoid them because they're dirty.

But Olivia Ranze was dirty and scary.

If you want to make war, stop it, and you point a knife at Olivia Ranze as she pushes in, that's when war happens.

No one wanted to start a war that could tear the continent in two. Except Olivia Ranze.

Eventually, Olivia led the Crusaders beyond the Temple gates and in front of the makeshift camp building where Reinhardt was being held.

The knights and mages of Shanapelle encamped there, as well as the Temple's forces, made sure Olivia couldn't get any closer than that.

The Empire shouldn't have told Olivia anything.

Keeping an eye on Olivia was the best thing that could have happened in that situation, but now it was the worst thing that could have happened, and it was leading back to the Empire.

Olivia, who had led the paladins, stood at the head of the line, looking at Bertus, who had blocked her way.

Behind Bertus are Shanapelle and the Imperial Mages.

Behind Olivia were the paladins of the Crusade.

"Get out of the way."

"I don't think so, sir."

Bertus, now on the verge of crossing the threshold between irritation and anger, stared at Olivia.

"We're the ones with the power over the devil. Hand it over."

Olivia demanded, and Bertus gritted his teeth.

The asshole is out of control.

You don't need to be convinced that your actions will cause continents to split and humanity to self-destruct.

On the outside, they'll give you a reason, but on the inside, you're probably thinking, "So what?

"The Empire is the voice of humanity, so it is only right that the Imperial House decides what to do with the enemy of humanity, the Demon King."

Olivia smirked at Bertus' comment.

"Humans are creatures of the gods. The Empire may have the right to speak for humanity, but doesn't it stand to reason that the Crusader Knights and the Great Houses of the Gods, who represent the will of the gods, should have one level of authority above yours? The collective will of humanity. Yes, speak up."

Olivia's jaw drops.

"I represent the will of God."

Since the creator of mankind is the gods, the will of the gods is higher than the will of man. The will of the gods is more right. And as Tuan's chosen champion, I represent the will of the gods.

What is against me is against God.

Olivia was honestly pushing the terrible logic of what happens when a champion of the gods uses his authority violently.

As Elise once said to Reinhardt.

Relics are powerful objects in their own right, but their political utility is greater.

Olivia Ranze was doing exactly that.

Faced with Olivia's attitude, Bertus, as well as the knights and wizards of the Empire, are fed up.

How is this different from insanity.

Is it really okay for a god-chosen champion to be so unrestrained?

I don't know why anyone would be chosen by God to commit this level of abuse.

Those who are not close to God begin to doubt His intentions.

But the paladins, equally fed up, begin to think differently about Olivia's behavior and speech at that level.

Paladins are close to the gods.

God is right.

So the champions, the masters of the gods' chosen relics, are right the second time around.

For Olivia Ranze, Tuan's chosen one, to act in this way means that the situation is such that the gods have to show their will in such a drastic way.

The champion engages in behavior that is violent, unruly, and seems to have gone a bit insane.

It's not because the champion is crazy.

Because that's what God wants us to do.

The world is in God's hands.

Champions represent the will of the gods.

So Olivia's rant is the more radical it is, the more blind it is, the more unruly it is.

The conclusion is that God wants extreme behavior.

For those who are not close to the gods, he is a champion of madness.

But the more the paladins see of Olivia's tyrannical behavior, the more they realize that the more extreme it is, the more it is supported by God.

So, for a moment, the mood of the paladins was one of fear that a continent-wide war might break out.

Realizing that I have no choice but to support Olivia Ranze's actions, which can only be an absolute good, and recognizing that it is the will of God.

Gradually, the look in his eyes begins to strengthen.

Faith, and faith alone.

It leads to conclusions and behaviors that differ from the universal.

"We are right about the Demon King's recruits. Is there anyone in the Empire who can deny this?"

As Olivia continues to speak, the paladins become increasingly vicious.

We're right because we have champions.

If you die on the spot, if it leads to war, it's God's will.

If you die here, you will die very close to the will of God.

What an honor.

"The Empire has identified and secured the Demon's identity. The Crusaders are now trying to steal the Empire's thunder."

Olivia shakes her head at Bertus's words.

"Yes, thank you for doing a difficult job. The High Priestess will give the Empire the tribute it deserves for your efforts, and may the gods bless you."

It's a cliché, but in the name of God, it's all true.

Even if you are told to see white as black, if it is the word of God, you must do it.

The eye that can't do that becomes the wrong eye.

Why do thine eyes see white, when thou hast seen black?

It's only God who can say that.

Champions are their advocates.

"A favor is a favor, a duty is a duty. I am here to fulfill a duty, not a right, and that duty is to determine if the Demon King is indeed a virtuous being or not."

Bertus gritted his teeth.

There's a lot that can be said.

You share Tiamata with the Devil, and you are doing this to protect him.

Are you not already pure when you share a soul with a demon?

You were once saved by a demon.

You are an enemy of mankind.

But all of those words are set up to create a huge conflict.

To say that the Champion of Tuan is not virtuous is already a major blasphemy.

To doubt Olivia Ranze's intentions is to doubt God's.

Sure, the empire is strong.

So, it's okay to doubt God's will.

Because even if God is an absolute proposition, if you say you disagree with it, that's it.

It could be argued that the gods are transcendent and lend their power to the world, but that they do not give those who wield that power the right to represent their absolute will.

No matter how powerful the Crusader Knights and the Five Great Houses may be, it is within the Empire's power to push them aside if it chooses.

However, religion is an anchor in its own right, and if the Empire tears it apart, it has already lost the grand idea of embracing all of humanity.

The Empire can wipe out the Five Great Houses and the Crusader Knights, but then the Empire collapses.

The Empire was founded under the banner of uniting many races, many cultures, and many beliefs against the demons.

When such an empire tries to cannibalize large groups of people, it inevitably leads to a situation where the empire loses its legitimacy.

Bertus has a lot to think about.

There's a lot to keep in mind.

Empire, Imperium, Humanity.

Say and do things to defend things that are too big to be true.

But Olivia only wants one thing.

Reinhardt.

That's why he doesn't care about the aftermath, he just wants to save Reinhardt now.

"I said get out of the way."

Olivia took a step, and the paladins behind her took a step, too, with an imposing momentum.

Shanapelle, the Imperial Mages, and Bertus did not back down.

However, if it continues, it will crash.

It was a close call.

If you give Olivia a demon instead of a war, the consequences are obvious.

Olivia will use the logic that since the Demon King has been chosen by the Sacred Object, the High Priestess should support him.

There's no telling where this path will lead.

War is always the worst option. It's even worse when it's between humans.

This is the moment to stop.

We need to stop this lunatic in his tracks.

"Why don't you have a little chat with the devil?"

"......what?"

"You know full well that the demand to hand over a recruit is outrageous, and we have no intention of denying the Crusaders their cause."

First, we need to put the brakes on this impending collision somehow.

One wrong word, one wrong deed, and you could start a war.

Bait the hook.

"Let's talk to the devil for a minute, and then we'll talk about it when he's a little calmer."

"......."

Olivia stares at Bertus.

Olivia doesn't realize that war is the worst option.

And Olivia didn't think it would be possible to hand over a recruit right now.

Olivia is here to practically deliver a warning that if you decide what to do with the Demon, you're in for a world of trouble.

The idea was to make the Empire hesitate to execute Reinhardt right now.

And in the long run, I was going to think of other ways to save Reinhardt.

I'll take you to see Reinhardt.

So back off.

"Good."

Olivia accepted the offer.

"Let me walk you through it."

Naturally, not all of the paladins could go in, so only Olivia, the representative, could go inside.

Not wanting to take it too far, Olivia was led by the Chanapelle knights into the camp.

First, we stalled.

Seeing that Olivia had moved away, Bertus approached one of the knights.

Olivia's rationale.

Relics.

A being that cannot be denied because it has chosen to be.

Demon and Olivia Ranze.

And one more thing.

A person whose very existence is a cause.

Someone who's just as good as Olivia Ranze, if not better.

"Get me Ellen Artorius, now."

You need Ellen Artorius.

\* \* \*

A makeshift dungeon.

Olivia was led by Shanapelle's knights down to the dungeon where Reinhard was imprisoned.

Upon arrival, I could only think of one thing.

"It's impossible to get them out by force.

Outside forces are one thing, but inside the dungeons are those who have crossed even the boundaries of superhumanity.

There was a resident Grandmaster, Saviolin Tana, and a number of Swordmasters, not to mention a number of Archmages, to prepare for any eventuality.

Saviolin Tana, a key manager, hadn't even worked a shift and was practically living here.

"I was wondering what the fuss was about. ......."

Seeing Olivia's stern expression, Savior Tana bit her lip.

"I have the emperor's permission."

Tana narrowed her eyes and moved out of the way, as if she'd gotten the gist of the situation.

Suddenly, Olivia could see Reinhardt hanging in chains.

He was gagged and his eyes were untied.

With her fists balled, Olivia approached Reinhardt and knelt in front of him.

To Reinhardt, who had watched over her for so long, protected her, and now left her in this miserable state.

To your own demon.

Olivia used her divine powers to heal Reinhardt, who was in full bloom.

"Reinhardt......."

Olivia was in tears as she treated Reinhardt.

The unfocused eyes shifted, finally meeting Olivia's. The cloudy eyes still hadn't returned, but they did recognize Olivia.

"I have a sister....... You have a sister......."

"......."

"By all means, by all means....... for you."

With that, Olivia gently nuzzled Reinhardt's bound neck.

After a brief embrace, Olivia brought her hand to the gag in Reinhardt's mouth.

-Thwack!

"I passed it down for a reason. Don't touch it."

Saviolin Tana held her sword to Olivia's throat.

"If you're going to kill me, kill me."

I'd rather die than not even be able to talk to Reinhardt after this mess.

Olivia untied Reinhardt's gag, not caring that Saviolin Tana's sword was at the nape of her neck.

-Took

Reinhardt was still haggard and unfocused in his eyes, though Olivia had restored him to health.

Saviolin Tana, unable to cut Olivia in the end.

"Reinhard, you didn't do anything wrong, did you? You didn't....... You didn't do anything wrong. We're going to have a meeting of the Five Great Houses to prove that you weren't bad at all, so......."

"My sister......."

Reinhard calls out to Olivia in a cracked voice.

It's the first time Reinhardt has ever called her that, and Olivia watches him with wide eyes.

"Don't......."

"......?"

"Don't do that....... Don't do that......."

Raising his head with difficulty, Reinhardt speaks, his eyes unfocused.

"My sister....... And then she died......."

That said.

You know, like, don't do anything dangerous because you're worried about yourself.

"I managed to keep him alive, but....... You did something dubious....... Don't die......."

That said.

"It's a waste....... How....... I saved your life......."

"ugh......."

Olivia eventually burst into tears.

Even in her near-dazed state, she couldn't stand the sound of Reinhardt worrying about Olivia, not himself.

"Do you think this....... You think you're evil demons?"

Through her tears, Olivia looks at Savior Tana, who holds a sword to her throat.

"Do you really think Reinhardt is....... is evil?"

"Even if the only person who cares about me in this situation is the devil....... It can't be evil....... It can't be true......."

"I'm sure Reinhardt had his reasons......."

"Everything Reinhardt has done, he's done for a reason. Maybe he's done it for a reason....... You have to tell the story....... for once......."

"Why."

"Why it had to be done."

"You can at least listen to it......."

"Just because he's a demon, just because he's suspicious, just because he's tied up like a beast, even gagged, and this is....... Right? This is outside the will of the gods....... All of that aside......."

"That's so cruel......."

The tip of Savior Tana's sword wobbled as she pointed it at Olivia.

The devil is.

Is it really evil.

A being telling me not to try to save Olivia because she might be in danger.

How evil can it be.

Could this be a lie?

"Beyond suspicion, beyond circumstance, beyond all that. What the hell did Reinhardt do, what the hell did he do, what the hell did he do......."

The demon's first raid was to rescue demonic captives who were being sold into slavery.

The devil could.

He raided the Crusaders to rescue Olivia Ranze, who was close to him.

Reinhardt was able to.

The final assault was the Empire's own doing.

The devil didn't do it.

It was what Saviolin Tana did at the behest of the Empire.

The Devil is.......

Is it evil?

Saviolin Tana looked at Olivia Ranze and Reinhardt, bit her lip, and sheathed her sword.

What the truth is.

What's true and what's false.

I was dying to know, and so was she.

As much as I'd like to believe Reinhardt wasn't bad, neither was anyone else.

But let's say the demon doesn't hate humanity.

"Why?

There are only reasons to hate it, so why bother.

Because they can't understand that part, they feel betrayed by the devil.

However.

"Reinhardt's words a little....... Even a little....... Listen to me....... Please....... Believe me....... Believe Reinhardt......."

Only Olivia Rancherman, who has nothing but blind trust and love for the Devil.

Olivia Lancemann, whose help has been crucial time and time again.

Let's trust Reinhardt in this situation, I pleaded.

Episode 443.

In the end, Olivia accomplished her goal.

The Empire has created a situation where they cannot dispose of Reinhardt on their own.

But Reinhardt's recruits were not to be handed over to the Crusaders. Bertus knew what Olivia's true purpose was.

Olivia will do everything she can to change Reinhardt's ways. Since she cannot do it by force, she will use her political power.

Reinhardt didn't have the energy to speak, so Olivia fed him water and porridge.

Only after crying and begging Reinhardt to eat, when he didn't seem to want to, did he take a small bite of Olivia's food.

All that spectacle.

Saviolin Tana watched in silence.

"I'll be back."

Olivia stood up and looked down at Reinhardt sympathetically.

I can't look away, but I can't stay in this position forever. It was in Reinhard's best interest to be busy, not in front of him, but where he couldn't see.

With that, Olivia pushed past Saviolin Tana and made her way through the corridors of the dungeon.

Tana stared at Reinhardt.

Really.

Does the devil have nothing to do with evil?

\* \* \*

When Olivia Ranze returned to the group waiting on the ground, she could see that there was an extra person there.

Somehow, I always felt blind before.

A dark-haired girl who now looks like she has no veins.

Ellen Artorius stood at Bertus's side.

You don't know why you're here, you just came because you were told to come.

He was an empty man, seemingly without thought or will.

What it looks like.

Somehow, it was like Reinhardt in the dungeon.

Just as Reinhardt seemed to have given up on everything in despair.

Ellen Artorius, too, seemed to have given up on everything, feeling betrayed.

Olivia looked over at Bertus, who had pulled Ellen aside, and smiled wryly.

"Oh, I see what you're thinking."

He's threatened by a holy object, so he brings in a warrior with another holy object.

To resist Olivia's tirade, we need a better reason.

Olivia is the champion of Tuan, chosen by Tiamata.

But Ellen is the sister of Lagan Artorius.

Not only does he have the support of the Order of Mensis, but he is also the brother of Lagan Artorius, so he has the support of the majority of the people.

Objectively, Ellen has a better cause than Olivia.

So Bertus brings Ellen in to stop Olivia's rant.

Ellen even has a lapelt, a holy symbol of the sun god.

Reinhard and Charlotte are the only ones who know that Ellen has a lapel.

However, if this is known, Ellen, as the holder of two holy relics, has a stronger case than Olivia.

Naturally, the paladins Olivia brought with her would be confused if Ellen had different ideas than Olivia.

A split in the paladins soon leads to a split in the support, and Olivia is no longer able to carry out her rampage.

Olivia, however, remains still and stares at Ellen.

Olivia doesn't realize that Ellen was instrumental in tracking down the demon.

Just that look.

I knew from the look on her face that she was about to lose everything in the world.

"Are you okay with this?"

"......."

Olivia's words were met with silence from Ellen.

"Are you just going to call Reinhardt an asshole, go cry yourself to sleep, and let him die?"

"......."

"You're that bad, huh?"

With that, the light returned to Ellen's dead eyes.

Anger.

Those cruel words, that her heart was nothing, brought Ellen's dead heart back to life.

"You, you know what."

"You don't really know, do you?"

Olivia raises the corner of her mouth at an angle.

"Well, I can see that you're going to end up in a corner, sobbing, 'Reinhard is the son of a bad demon who killed my brother.'"

Ellen gritted her teeth at the taunt.

"My, my heart....... What I....... what I think....... How I loved Reinhardt....... How I loved....... How I feel....... How does my sister know....... How do you know....... My sister....... What the hell do you know......."

Olivia laughed, covering her mouth, as she watched Ellen finally shake the tears from her eyes.

"Oh yeah, you're sad. Be sad. Be sad. Who said anything?"

Olivia smiles a sinister smile.

It's as if they forgot that a bunch of powerhouses and paladins are watching.

Like you're only thinking about expressing yourself and getting naked.

"Maybe Reinhardt is evil. Maybe he's a bad guy. Maybe he's up to something incredibly evil. Yeah, that's a possibility."

"By the way."

"I'll trust Reinhardt to the end."

"Go to the end of the line and get betrayed or whatever."

"Even if I'm wrong."

"I'll trust you, Reinhard."

"So you were, like, that's all you had."

"Reinhardt is the devil. I'm so scared, so sad, so betrayed, I'm going crazy."

"You're doing it. You're going to wither and die. Like an asshole."

"Either you believe and be unhappy, or you don't believe and be unhappy. If you have a choice."

"I'm going to be unhappy for believing it, do you understand?"

"Not like you, it's different."

I shouldn't have said that in front of the paladins.

But Olivia blurted it out nonchalantly.

I believe in the devil.

"Let's go back."

Olivia gestures to the Paladins, who are stunned by the barrage of bombshells.

Hands in pockets, fiddling.

Instead of being a champion of Tuan, he returns to lead the paladins, looking more like a neighborhood bully.

Ellen's face turned a deep shade of blue.

I, that's all.

I'm too scared to even think about listening.

Either you're unhappy because you believe, or you're unhappy because you don't.

If both are misery, which misery is better.

Shocked that I'd been duped all this time, I sat in the corner of the room.

Everything Olivia Ranze said was true.

I don't think this sentiment is false.

I didn't think I could lose to anyone with the size of my heart.

To stay like this, dumbfounded, fearful, and betrayed.

Ellen didn't know anything else, but she did know one thing.

I don't know what it does well.

If you're crying like this, you must be wrong.

\* \* \*

Olivia Ranze returned to lead the paladins.

Before the entire continent knows of the warrior's existence, rumors will swirl that he was a demon.

Conflict with religious groups was inevitable. Bertus' job now was to keep it from turning into a war.

After Olivia's return, the vigilance dropped, and Bertus walked into the office with Ellen.

Reinhardt is the devil, yes.

Olivia Ranze decided to trust Reinhardt anyway.

I didn't want to think that I could trust it because it had saved me so many times.

Believing makes you unhappy, not believing makes you unhappy.

If there are two paths to take, Olivia Ranze said, believe it and be unhappy.

You were just that good.

Olivia's words stuck in Ellen's chest.

Was it something I could trust?

They've been hiding things like that, and I'm supposed to believe them.

Is it possible.

That's, uh, impossible.

I don't think that's possible.

Ellen had just seen someone who could do that.

Of course, Olivia is technically in the Devil's good graces, so it's easier for her to believe in him.

Ellen thinks.

Everything that's happened so far.

Maybe all that time wasn't a lie. I wonder if believing in Reinhardt can make the time that is now all fake real.

I'm a little more.

Reinhardt, I wonder if I should have trusted him.

What Olivia could do, she couldn't do.

I wondered, was that really all there was to it?

"......."

Ellen could only stare blankly at the table.

"Ellen, you have every right to attend the papal council of the Five Great Houses, you know that, right?"

"...... is it?"

At Bertus's words, Ellen mumbled to herself.

"Olivia Ranze is going to bring the Demon over to the Crusaders' side and then try to justify his actions somehow, so you're the only one who's going to be able to put the lunatic's foot down on that."

"......Yes."

"......."

At Ellen's lackluster response, Bertus crosses his arms and looks at her.

"Do you really want to believe Reinhardt, too?"

"......."

"It's the same for everyone, I want all the crazy stuff Reinhardt says to be true, but I can't believe it, it doesn't make sense, and even if Reinhardt's intentions are true, the problem is still the same."

Ellen bit her lip.

"At this rate, Olivia's going to come up with some bullshit about how the Demon King is the chosen one for two holy relics, so he should be recognized as the champion, and then humanity will be released into the world with the two main religions and the Demon Gods in their hands. Regardless of Reinhardt's claim that he doesn't really hate humans, there could be a second Demon War in the future, let alone two continents. Regardless of Reinhardt's wishes, the division is certain."

It's hard to tell if they're just demons or champions of the gods.

There, the fetishists follow the devil.

Not only does he manage to pull off the miraculous feat of uniting the gods and demons, but he does so in a way that makes him a force completely exclusive to the Empire.

Reinhardt's presence is so huge that even if he didn't want a conflict, it would already be the start of a huge conflict.

Bertus had an empire to protect, and he couldn't allow the demon to be unleashed on the world.

Ellen listened to the story, then spoke up.

"I'll try to make it to the Great Council of Bishops."

Without saying what we're going to talk about there.

"Me....... Can I see Reinhardt....... to see him?"

Ellen said, as if that was the only thing on her mind.

\* \* \*

Standing in front of Reinhardt in chains, Ellen was surprised by the guilt that rose up from the depths of her chest.

It was crucial in capturing the demon that threatened humanity.

It was a job well done, and one for the history books.

But what Ellen felt as soon as she saw Reinhardt's limp form wasn't a sense of exhilaration or vengeance.

The guilt that creeps up on you is overwhelming.

I.

I called Reinhardt.

I made Reinhardt look like this.

"......."

I had no doubt that I would be treated well, but seeing it was another matter.

Ellen's fingertips trembled and her breath caught in her throat as she watched.

It was like someone was squeezing my heart.

Reinhard raises his head with difficulty and stares at Ellen, who stands outside the cage.

Reinhard, gagged, struggling to look at an unseen Ellen with out-of-focus eyes, not sure if he's exhausted or given up.

Finally, when she recognized him and saw the tears forming in Reinhardt's unfocused eyes, she wanted to rip his chest out.

"......."

Are even those tears fake?

It can't be.

No way, no how.

Ellen gripped the bars, her lips trembling as she watched Reinhardt inside the cell.

I.

What the hell did I do.

What did I do?

I want to say I'm sorry.

Knowing she had no right to say such a thing, Ellen remained silent.

The son of the demon who killed his brother.

The ones you've been fooling around with.

All the things you've been doing without telling anyone.

All of that disappeared when he saw Reinhardt's broken body.

It's my fault.

I screwed everything up.

I should have trusted you more.

At the very least, I should have listened.

I didn't.

Fear and panic, betrayal and suspicion.

I didn't even listen.

If I had done that, if I had given it a chance to speak for itself.

No. I actually said.

I said it jokingly, but it could have been a way of trying to deal with my inner frustration and depression.

If you listened to him at all back then.

If I hadn't taken it as a silly, unpleasant prank.

This might not have happened.

He didn't trust Reinhardt.

So.

Everything is broken.

"I am....... I screwed up....... screwed up......."

Savior Tana stares at Ellen, her whole body shaking and sobbing.

Reinhardt is gagged and unable to say anything.

Reinhardt shakes his head, though.

As if it's not your fault.

The sight made Ellen shake even more violently, and she couldn't help but feel sick.

Saviolin Tana stares at the scene.

Ellen Artorius, who had captured the demon herself, broke down at the sight of the captured demon.

Olivia Ranze declared that she would save Reinhardt.

By winning the hearts of so many important beings, Reinhardt opened up the possibility of survival even after he was revealed to be a demon.

If the Devil himself is the owner of the relic, and he has the support of Olivia and Ellen, the Devil can survive through political means, not war.

No, that's not all.

It's possible, even probable, that they'll be able to rip off half of humanity and bring it into their power.

Maybe it's because they've been unmasked, or maybe it's because they've been found out.

Also.

A ploy of the devil.

Saviolin Tana sees the figure of the Devil beyond the crying Ellen.

The devil shaking his head as if to say it's not your fault, so don't cry.

I wonder if that struggle could be a lie.

More and more in Saviolin Tana's mind.

A dark cloud of suspicion and doubt hung over us.

Episode 444.

An alley somewhere in the ecliptic.

"EpinHauser, why aren't you going along with the Order's decision?"

"......."

Effinghauser leaned back against the wall and listened as a woman in black robes spoke to him.

"It's almost certain that the Council has Akasha. I thought I told you to track Akasha through the House of Demand."

"We don't really know what Akasha is yet."

At Effinghauser's short answer, the woman in black robes snapped her white fingers.

"Isn't it something we can think about once we have that akasha?"

"Akasha could be used by a council that feels threatened by tampering with the House of Demand."

"......."

The Black Order's goal was never to secure Akasha, but rather the destruction of Cantus Magna. After the Battle of Ricci's Tomb, the Council broke off contact with the Black Order.

That it is no longer possible to continue the alliance.

In other words, I must have brushed my hand off at just the right time because the purpose had already been accomplished.

It's not exactly unreasonable. Alliances, by their nature, only last as long as their interests align.

But now, Order was trying to deal with a new threat: Akasha.

The only current clue is Lucinil, the patriarch of Demand, who has gone undercover as a Temple first-year.

But Eppinhauser, a Temple insider, is ignoring the Order's decision to track down Lucinil and learn of Akasha's whereabouts.

"Effinghauser, I hope you don't have your heart set on the devil."

That's why Oder could not help but suspect the mind of the silent Effinghauser.

"The Order agrees with you that the Demon is more necessary than anyone else to the cohesion and maintenance of the Empire, which is why we kept him alive instead of killing him."

"......."

"But that was only true when the demon was weak and had too few forces. You were right then, but things are different now."

Effinghauser was silent.

"The demon will die soon. No, if he survives, the problem will only grow."

"He can't be weak anymore, he can create countless political divisions in his empire, and he can give as many powerful forces as he wants."

"And on top of that, we have Akasha."

"The Demon, by its very existence, is already a sign of great division, and will be the beginning of the collapse of the Empire."

"The Devil will let him die, and if he survives, the Order will have a hand in it."

"So, Effinghauser, I want you to focus on securing Akasha, which is the biggest risk right now. For now, the only clue is the steady stream of demand."

"The Order exists for the good of the Empire and the good of humanity. Have you forgotten what matters most?"

At the words of the woman in black robes, Effinghauser shook his head.

"I didn't forget."

"Then why aren't you following the order's decision?"

Black order.

They exist for order.

Order for empire and humanity.

They do the dirty work to support the empire, sometimes in places the empire doesn't know about, and sometimes by doing things that are socially unacceptable.

As such, working with the Devil for the sake of the Empire was one of the Order's many contradictions.

Demons are a great threat to the empire.

However, an overly weak demon can be useful.

An empire showing signs of fragmentation after the Demon War needed such an abstract enemy.

It looks like another giant dark cloud hanging over humanity, but it's really just a weakened demon.

The Order chose to watch from the sidelines rather than eliminate such a demon. It was more accurate to see the extent of the demon's power from the perspective of an ally.

In fact, based on the reports we've received, it's clear that the Devil has no particular animosity or malice toward humanity.

A demon that is not hostile to mankind, but definitely exists.

Such a demon was exactly what humanity and the Empire needed.

However, as the demon secured the holy relic, things started to get weird.

The story would change with another member of the Order, Cantus Magna.

The devil is out of the bag.

To be precise, the demon's existence has already become too dangerous on its own.

Reinhardt was a weak demon, which suited the Order's tastes.

Show up in just the right place at just the right time, whenever there's a crisis of empire-breaking, and a frightened humanity will cling to each other.

The Order realizes that the Demon King doesn't actually have much animosity toward humanity, but rather a symbiotic relationship, and isn't actually all that eager to rebuild the Demon Realm.

But despite their intentions, demons are the chosen champions of the gods, and their minions now possess a very dangerous artifact called Akasha. There's even a faction that follows them called the Demon Cult.

He knows that the demon is harmless, but he doesn't approach the case with that concept and perspective.

The Devil has become too much of a dangerous symbol.

So it should be removed.

Akasha is dangerous.

So you have to get it.

The first of the two will be taken care of by the empire.

So the order should focus on the second thing: securing Akasha.

The person who was supposed to do it, one of the most important people inside the Temple, wasn't listening.

"I just think you have to be careful with a bomb that you don't know where it's going to end up if you mess with it."

EpinHauser has a point.

If you try to force Akasha's location by capturing and torturing her, the council may be forced to take extreme measures.

"......Remember, Effinghauser, that the passage of time does us no favors."

"I'll keep that in mind."

-Snarl

Once the black-robed woman was out of sight, Eppinhauser stepped back out onto the boulevard and headed toward the Temple.

As always, the overly stoic Eppinhauser is simply dressed to the nines and headed to the temple.

The goodness or badness of existence and intent is irrelevant.

Eliminate threats to the Empire and promote its revival.

Even if that's not what the Empire intended.

The Black Order exists to serve him, to be the pillar of his empire in the Shadowlands. Lesser members of the Order are unaware of its true intentions.

There are also those who receive and carry out orders, and covet the power that the Order gives them in exchange for doing so.

But we are not such a fly on the wall.

Beyond the Temple gates, Effinghauser walks through the still-cluttered Temple grounds.

The Demon himself, and his forces, must have been weak and small.

The Order cooperated with the Demon, in part, so that they could watch its growth up close and deal with it when it crossed the line.

We've crossed that line now.

The Empire will take care of the demon's life, but the Order must deal with Akasha.

Riding the tram to the Royal Class dormitory, Effinghauser quietly called out to first-year Lucinille.

Gazoo of demand.

The silver-haired kid.

Epinhauser sometimes wondered.

The forces of the Devil seem to be a bunch of dumbasses, just like the Devil himself.

"......What's going on?"

Lucinil still remained in the Temple to keep tabs on what was going on inside. His face was not a happy one, given the circumstances.

And they were the only touchpoints between councils and orders.

That's why she was nervous.

If EpinHauser gets aggressive, we have to respond.

Remaining inside the temple is the only way to communicate about Valerie's imprisonment, so Lucinil is unable to leave the temple despite her exposure.

"Akasha, do you have it?"

"......."

At Effinghauser's question, Lucinil fell silent and slowly backed away.

"What is Akasha?"

"......."

"Akasharo, what are you guys going to do?"

Effinghauser hadn't approached Rusinil, he was just asking questions on the spot.

"You guys, are you going to be on our side?"

Rusinil asks something else entirely. Effinghauser shakes his head at that.

"No, we can't be on your side anymore. Apart from Akasha's problems."

It shouldn't have to be said, but Effinghauser said it anyway.

"Well, there's no reason for me to tell you that."

"The Order has instructed me to use force to extract Akasha's whereabouts from you."

"......that, do you think it's possible?"

Gazoo of demand.

An old vampire. Lucinil looks at Eppinhauser with a gaze full of enmity.

"I don't think it's necessarily impossible."

Unlike Rusinil, who was on alert, Eppinhauser could only stare at him.

"However, this is the meaning of the order."

"......what?"

At Effinghauser's rambling, Rusinil's eyes widened.

The Black Order are those who seek to do good with evil.

Good does not mean absolute, but good for humanity and justice for humanity alone.

However, EpinHauser saw.

Not for long, though.

Just a boy with a bad temper.

I watched the boy grow from nothing to gritting his teeth.

I've seen them struggle, unbowed, in the midst of petty justice and petty conviction.

I knew the boy was a demon, and I saw that he didn't hate humanity after what he had been through.

On the contrary, I have seen them loving humans and sometimes trying to save them.

I haven't been watching from the sidelines.

As a teacher, I watched him grow.

They're not much different than any other human being, but I've seen them climb up and up and up, doing whatever they set their minds to.

An order is a group that does good with evil.

An organization where the mere mention of your name is a curse, where you must work in the shadows, unappreciated by anyone, in the name of the Empire.

That's why pride is the most important thing for the Order's members.

There can only be so much pride and conviction to do something so evil that you can't even rationalize it.

However.

Humanity deserves to be hated.

He saw a being who loved humanity more than anyone else, when it was physically and logically impossible for him not to hate humanity.

That's just not possible.

A demon who made possible what should have been impossible.

How much pride and conviction do they have in their existence.

We can't fathom it.

He who does not hate mankind, must die carrying his hatred.

Without accomplishing anything.

Without the sympathy of anyone, without the understanding of anyone she loved.

Pride, conviction, and desire, unknown to anyone.

They should die with the label of traitor and deceiver.

A world where such pride should be dampened.

A world where such beliefs should be insulted.

If the world is such that such a being must die a miserable death, having accomplished nothing.

What are pride and beliefs anyway.

If the greatest beliefs and pride in the world had to be erased.

What value is there in that, and why.

What in the world does that mean?

You've lived your entire life with that one belief and pride.

If this is the way he must die, a man whose pride was greater than himself, a man who sought to do good in the name of forgiveness and unity, not evil.

To die in stigma and infamy, never understood by anyone.

In such a world.

If it is the will of the gods.

Believers.

World map.

Worthless.

Someone's misunderstanding, because it's a misunderstanding, makes them hate the boy.

Someone's misunderstanding, because it's a misunderstanding, touches the boy.

"The Order can't be on your side, but I think I can be on your side."

That's why, Effinghauser said.

\* \* \*

The fall of Olivia Lance has left the Empire unable to touch the Demon.

Whatever disposition was to be made of the demon would have to be discussed with the Five Great Lords first.

As it turns out, Olivia Ranze's "stalling for time" was a huge success.

And with Olivia's words, word spread like wildfire across the zodiac.

The demon is captured.

Not long ago, Reinhardt, who was said to have been chosen by Alsbringer, was the Devil himself.

Rumors that a demon had infiltrated the human race.

And the truth that the demon was chosen by Alsbringer.

It was causing shock and confusion.

The devil's capture should be a cause for relief, for the gods could not have been unaware of it, and giving the devil a holy object would have meant that the gods intended it.

It is even the holy object that is of the greatest value to humanity right now.

The sword of the warrior who killed his father is now in the hands of his son.

What the heck does Als serve.

Does the War God want a great war, as his name implies?

What the gods want.

Gods, have you abandoned us?

Why would they choose a demon and not a human for their king?

The people were confused and afraid, even though the demon had been captured.

And.

Temples.

Breakfast time.

"You, I guess, knew."

Liana de Granz looked at Herriot and said, "You know what?

Herriot could only bow his head like a sinner before Liana, unable to speak.

Ellen and Harriet have been weird lately.

Riana nodded, as if she finally understood what the two strange looks meant.

Reinhardt was the demon who killed Duke Granz.

I've even been to a funeral.

Riana nodded slowly as she heard that.

"Harriet, I need to talk to you later."

"Huh? Ah....... Yeah......."

Herriot watched, still, as the tip of the fork in Riana's hand burned.

第 445 集

The news that Reinhardt was a demon was causing a stir throughout the zodiac, but it was the Temple that was most disturbed.

Temple's students were white-faced when they realized what had caused the recent upheaval in the Temple.

I thought temples were the safest place after the imperial palace, but this one was haunted by a demon.

And now he's been found out and is trapped.

Not surprisingly, there was a lot of commotion, panic, and students packing up and leaving the temple.

A temple in disarray.

And, most importantly, Royal Class.

"No....... What's wrong with that? Even if Reinhardt's an asshole......."

Erich de Lapaeri shook his head, his mouth hanging open in disbelief.

The Ganodab death penalty was a bit of an icebreaker.

I thought it was a little weird, and I wondered why I couldn't see Reinhardt, but then I realized it was just too big.

He may not have been friendly, but he was sharing a roof with the devil.

Apart from being surprised, we were all in disbelief.

He's got a very nasty temper, and now he's been chosen by an artifact, so I'm thinking he's on a different level.

That Reinhardt is the devil.

"What the hell is this....... What the hell is this......."

Heinrich von Schwarz was frozen.

"No, there's something wrong with you. Does this....... makes sense?"

Kono Lindt said.

"......."

Kai, who'd fought Reinhardt as soon as he saw him in first grade, was shaking.

\* \* \*

"Are we misunderstanding something?"

Ludwig was huddled with a group of B-class kids talking about it.

"No, Reinhardt wouldn't do that, he's human."

"I think he used some kind of transformation magic....... with transformation magic."

At Delphine's words, Ludwig narrowed his eyes and shook his head.

"But how do I get into the temple?"

Lanyon Sessor's words made Christina shake her head.

"I don't know, maybe there's some kind of magic. He's a demon....... But I don't really get it......."

Class B was equally shocked and confused by the revelation that Reinhardt was a demon.

Scarlett walked past classmates who said the same thing.

Scarlett herself, though she realized it earlier than they did, was equally unhappy with the status quo.

"So, everything that's happened so far involving the Devil was Reinhardt's....... was Reinhardt's doing?"

Crusader Massacre.

Raziern Raid.

And the reappearance of the Satanists.

When I told them that it was all Reinhardt's orders, they freaked out.

In the next class over, Reinhardt, who I thought was just a brilliant classmate, revealed his true colors.

Demons that go so far as to massacre civilians.

Everyone felt scared and betrayed.

"Reinhardt is....... Why?"

At the funeral of Duke Granz, Ludwig saw Reinhardt.

That pensive look was fake?

In reality, you killed your friend's parents on his orders and showed up to the funeral?

Why it had to be.

Just for the sake of desperation?

Ludwig couldn't understand the connection between all of this.

We were talking about it.

As the students chatted in the hall, they soon saw a shadowy figure creeping up from somewhere down the hall.

"Hey, what's that......?"

An unidentifiable shadow stalked the hallway. All the students jumped to their feet in fright.

Something ominous and dark was rising from somewhere, as if it were trying to take over the world.

While everyone was frozen in place, only Ludwig turned toward the hallway.

An unidentified saccharine aura envelops the entire hallway.

Although he couldn't tell, Ludwig thought it was B-1, the dormitory at the head of the hall.

Soon, I realized it was coming from Charlotte's room.

Something has happened to Charlotte.

"Charlotte!"

Ludwig pushes through the chaos and opens the door to Charlotte's visit.

-click!

The door was unlocked.

"Shah....... Charlotte......?"

Between rooms in a dormitory.

There, Charlotte sat up in bed, a black aura emanating from her body.

Ludwig, as well as the other students, rushed over and saw that Charlotte was surrounded by an ominous aura.

Charlotte sits on her bed in a daze, her red demonic eyes fixed on Ludwig and her classmates.

"Me......."

In a voice close to dying.

"Leave it alone......."

Charlotte de Gradias said.

\* \* \*

Temple students learned about Charlotte's condition.

Charlotte was promptly escorted to the palace by members of the imperial household.

We don't know exactly what it is, but the students don't know if it's Charlotte's superpower, which has been kept secret until now, or something else.

Charlotte was kidnapped by the Devil and kept close to the Devil's heir.

Demon's Curse.

There was talk among the students that the Empress had received something similar.

Rumor begets rumor, which begets manufactured truth.

Charlotte de Gradias, arguably the greatest victim of the Devil, was now under suspicion of something else entirely.

1The Empress was not actually a collaborator of the Devil.

It's suspicious that you made it out of Demon Castle unscathed.

And it just so happened that my closest classmate was the son of the devil.

It's possible that this was all planned, and that Empress 1 was not used, but rather a collaborator.

Most people don't realize that Charlotte and Ellen played a crucial role in following the Devil's trail, and it wouldn't make a difference if they did.

People jump to conclusions and put things together.

Suspicious things mix and match to create a truth that was never there.

1The Empress is suspicious.

The rumors that spread were creating another truth, looking for their next target.

1The empress was in too high a position to fall prey to such rumors.

However, she didn't know how long that position would protect her.

\* \* \*

Crusader Headquarters, Great Hall.

With an urgent religious agenda, the room was packed with people who wouldn't normally gather.

Not to mention the Popes of the Five Great Houses, starting with Elayon Bolton, Grand Master of the Crusader Knights, through Tuan, Mensis, Als, Riter, and Shalam.

Two champions. Olivia Ranze and Ellen Artorius.

One representing each of the denominations, and one representing the combined forces of the denominations.

And the champion chosen by the gods.

A group of people who couldn't possibly be in the same room at the same time, and at the head of the table, Olivia and Ellen sat on either side of me.

Such is the authority of the Champion of the Gods.

Even if they're not actually believers, like Ellen, the Champions carry a great deal of religious authority and symbolism in their own right. This is why both Olivia and Ellen, who are believers and priests in the first place, are granted seats by the Pope.

But there was silence in the room.

For generations, the gods of the five major religions were perceived as gods for humans.

We've always only granted holy items to humans.

The demons have been separated from each other by the name of demigods, claiming to have their own faith.

But Als, the war god, chose a demon.

The god of war, who had given a holy object to a warrior to kill a demon, now chose the slain demon's son.

That's why the popes have been slow to speak out.

I couldn't figure out what the hell was going on.

Olivia was the first to speak up.

"The choice of the gods is right, and so I believe there is some will in Als' choice of the Devil, a will so great that it is beyond our comprehension, but I believe it will work out in the end to great good and justice."

Though she had no interest in the will of the gods, it was easy for Olivia to pretend.

The will of the gods is too great for us to comprehend, but there is a reason why the devil was chosen. So this is both a long-term good and an absolute good.

Olivia's logic was that we should tolerate the existence of the devil.

It was the Pope of the Tuan Order who responded to Olivia's words.

"Champion. Demons have been the enemy of mankind for generations, and their leader, the Demon King, is absolutely the enemy of mankind, and possesses powers beyond our comprehension, so it is not beyond the realm of possibility that he may have used those inscrutable powers to tamper with the holy object."

"To doubt the absoluteness of a holy object is to doubt the absoluteness of the gods. Now, are you denying the Lord's choice?"

The Pope of the Order of Tuan countered with the Pope of the Order of Als.

To say that a holy relic of Alth has been stolen through unholy influence is to deny the will of the War God as well as the Order of Alth.

As such, the Order of Als was bound to be the most sensitive.

Olivia smiled faintly at that comment from the Cult of Alth pope.

It's not Olivia who has to defend Reinhardt now, it's actually the Order of Als.

The current Cult of Alth has the largest number of adherents among the Five Great Houses of the Gods, due to the fact that the warrior defeated the demon with the Alsbringer.

But now that this has happened, the members of the Order of Als and their priests are the most shaken.

The last thing he wanted was for his authority to be denied or questioned.

If you're going to affirm the devil, you're going to affirm it completely, and if you're going to deny it, you're going to deny it extremely.

"I don't mean to imply that ......, but I just wanted to say that I don't think it's rash to fully affirm the devil because we don't know what kind of power he has or what kind of unholy things he can do, and that's what I wanted to talk about."

At the words of the Tuan Cult Pope, everyone nodded slowly.

They realize that this is turning into a huge religious conflict, and that one has already begun. It's entirely possible that decisions made here could ignite a massive war.

They knew that making a rash decision would put everyone at risk.

Denying the Devil outright undermines the foundation of faith in the Five Great Gods.

Affirming the Demon King could lead to war between the Empire and the Five Great Houses.

So, for now, we decided to take a wait-and-see approach.

And everyone was on the lookout for Olivia Ranze.

While the situation and doctrine make sense, Olivia makes no secret of the fact that she is entirely on the Devil's side.

Tuan's champion is an asshole who will go to war.

That's why everyone had to clench their molars when Olivia told them to open their mouths.

And it was the Pope of the Tuan Cult who was the worst.

What was once a saint and the next leader of the Tuan Order, or the next Crusader Knight, had become an extremist.

Tuan, why would you choose to do that and not.......

I couldn't help but have the kind of thoughts I shouldn't have.

"The Pope of the Order of Tuan seems to have a bad complexion."

Of course, this isn't Olivia, who wouldn't know that.

I've explained this to Elion Bolton, but there's something the other popes in the room don't know yet.

"Um, I want to share a fun fact with you."

Olivia giggles and summons Tiamata.

"Actually, I'm sharing Tiamata with the devil."

"What?!"

There is one denomination that must now defend the existence of the Devil.

Cult of Als.

"So there's not one, but two champions of Tuan."

And now the Tuan Order has been added.

Ellen and Elion Bolton, who already knew about it, were silent.

But the popes of the Five Patriarchates were appalled.

The Demon King was not only chosen by Als, but also by Tuan. Everyone's reaction was one of disbelief.

We can't exactly prove it, and Olivia could be lying to get the devil on her side.

"If you doubt my word, ask the Champion of Mensis."

Olivia gestured to Ellen with her chin.

A warrior's sister and the only one in a position to stop Olivia's atrocities.

I look at Ellen Artorius as if I want everyone to say please, no.

"It's true."

Ellen had no intention of lying.

"Oh, gods......."

One of the popes let out an ambiguous sigh that I didn't know whether to blame or praise God for.

I don't know if it's just the Cult of Als, but the Cult of Tuan.

The Pope of the Tuan Order was a madman.

I can't believe my champion is an idiot for siding with the devil, and he even chose the devil.

"And since you've been Tuan's champion since last year, you have to be Tuan's champion first, right?"

"Yes, that's right."

This was the situation of the Pope of the Tuan Order, who thought his house was on fire, only to find that his own house had been reduced to ashes.

Not one, but two.

They don't realize that Ellen now has the Lapelt, the holy relic of Shalam.

This is why the Devil now has two holy relics, making him the most powerful symbol in religion right now.

One is bad enough, but two is worse.

It's hard enough to say that Alsbringer was somehow tricked into being stolen, but to claim that two were stolen is to say that the gods are incompetent.

That's basically impossible.

So is it possible to affirm the existence of the Devil?

There are bound to be a lot of people in the crowd who are psychologically incapable of accepting that, as well as a lot of people in the church who can't understand it.

Not only will you be feuding with an empire, but you'll also be feuding with a religious group called the Crusaders.

In the long run, Tuan and Als could be stigmatized as nothing more than a demonic cult.

In the long run, the death of the denomination itself; in the short run, religious wars.

The bad news.

Or worse.

They were faced with the worst of all possible worlds.

"First of all, I think we can all agree that our decision on the matter of the devil is the right one, right?"

Olivia's naturally virtuous words stunned the Crusader Knights and the Five Great Patriarchs.

We make no secret of our intentions that if the Devil comes into our clutches, we will claim his innocence after a proper trial, and that we will release him safely in the future.

But I have to agree that this is a problem that needs to be solved at the hands of the Five Great Houses.

It's about the authority of the Church of the Lord.

The Pope of the Five Great Houses sees Ellen as having a voice similar to Olivia's.

Please feel like you're the only one who's sane.

Like please, please, please put the brakes on that crazy champion of purity somehow.

"Line....... No, to the devil......."

Ellen Artorius opens her mouth.

"I think they should be given a chance to explain everything that's happened."

That was easy enough.

Episode 446.

Olivia's insistence that the Devil's recruits be brought to the Order of the Five Masters.

Ellen's insistence on giving calling a chance.

The two arguments are both similar and different. For one thing, Ellen wasn't arguing for a demonic recruit.

At the very least, you should give him a chance to tell you what he's been up to and whether or not it was meant to harm humanity.

Fortunately or unfortunately, the popes were more receptive to Ellen's middle-of-the-road approach than Olivia's extreme claims.

"Let's do a public interrogation or something....... What are we talking about?"

When Bertus heard the results of the papal conference of the Five Great Houses, his expression was stern.

We don't know what that means.

"Okay, that's better because it doesn't sound like a ridiculous request to unleash the devil......."

It wasn't some Olivia Lanchester-esque insanity that demanded we either give up the devil or go to war.

"I don't know if this will make any difference, but if it'll shut up the Church of the Lord, I'll give it a try......."

Even if it's unclear whether it's a public trial or a public inquisition, it gives Olivia Lance's gang some ground to stand on.

I already gave you everything you deserved at the last public hearing, so don't ask for more.

Interrogating a demon in public.

Bertus chewed on his lip, though he hadn't gone as far as Olivia had.

If even Ellen Artorius sided with the devil, things could get out of hand.

Tiamata, Alsbringer, and Lament.

Once the three holy objects are attached to the Devil, there is no reason for the Five Great Divinities not to be attached to the Devil, for to deny them would be to destroy the very foundation of the faith.

Of course, the higher-ups in the Church don't support the Devil because they want to support him. It's literally crying and eating mustard.

If the entire Five Great Houses of God were to support the Demon King, the world would literally fall apart.

"And Charlotte?"

"You are currently quarantined in the Palace of Spring."

Bertus sighed.

Charlotte's deteriorating condition was also a serious concern for Bertus.

You've captured a demon.

That should have solved everything, but somehow things just seemed to spiral out of control.

\* \* \*

The Five Great Houses and the Empire will publicly interrogate the Demon King.

What you've been up to, how you got to the point where you've been chosen, and if there's really been any dirty tricks involved.

Whether the devil is really unclean or not.

We will interrogate the demon and determine his disposition as mutually agreed upon.

The story went viral.

Of course, this was a public interrogation, so no civilians were allowed to observe.

It was only allowed to those who had a say in the matter, or a right to watch.

Imperial Emperor, Neliod de Gradias.

Bertus de Gradias, First Emperor of the Empire.

The popes of each of the five major Christian denominations.

Elayon Bolton, Crusader Knight Commander.

Olivia Ranze, champion of Tuan.

Ellen Artorius, Champion of Mensis.

And the Shanapels and Imperial Mages for security and escort.

Paladins of the Five Great Houses.

Plus, Scarlett, an immunizer, just in case the devil tries to pull a fast one on us.

Charlotte, who was in no condition to be seen outside, was unable to attend.

It was decided that the interrogation would take place inside the Temple's general headquarters.

No immediate interrogations were conducted. Numerous connections and magical measures had already begun to be taken inside the temple, which had already been vetted for safety, just in case.

The outcome of this interrogation will determine whether the Five Great Houses and the Empire will become enemies or maintain a fragile peace.

Two days later.

The public interrogation of the Demon King begins.

"......."

In the distance, Harriet sees the General Headquarters building.

Herriot is not available for public questioning.

Whether it's the right thing to do or not, we don't know.

It's probably not the right thing to do, thinks Herriot de Saint-Ouen.

But I decided to do it anyway.

I chose to believe it.

That urgency.

That longing.

In the end, Herriot couldn't deny it.

So.

You want to do what you're supposed to do.

If you have to betray everything you know to trust just one person.

I decided to do that, and I did.

\* \* \*

"Two days later....... "

"The Lord of Demand said so."

Eleris nodded at Antrianus' words.

"We believe the time is right. When it happens, we'll be ready to act."

"......."

"Do you know enough about Akasha to use it?"

"It's ......."

Eleris nodded in agreement.

Preparing the tools of creation to be used for destruction.

Eleris was ready to go.

Valier will blame himself.

You can't help but feel resentful.

Because of this, the demon will become a symbol of hate and loathing to all beings.

Just to survive.

Just to survive.

Is it really right to take on all that hatred just to survive?

Is it okay to put someone in that position to avoid death?

Will Bali be happy to see it survive?

Eleris knows the answer.

It won't.

However.

To save the child he endangered, the last of his descendants.

Eleris has decided to destroy the world.

To live wickedly, to live hypocritically.

In the end, I decided to pave the way for absolute evil, which is neither hypocrisy nor hypocrisy nor anything else.

\* \* \*

Two days have passed in an ambiguous period of time where everyone feels an inexplicable sense of foreboding.

Outside the makeshift camp where the demon was being held, Shanapelle, the Imperial Mages, and a number of paladins were already present.

For the empire, it was a meeting of the minds to come to an agreement with the Five Great Priests, and for the Five Great Priests to find out whether or not the existence of the Demon King was justified.

To escort the Demon King to the General Headquarters, a number of people were prepared to lead the way.

Even in these situations, there are onlookers.

Around the cell where the demon was sure to be imprisoned, there were students who tried to watch the spectacle from a distance.

Flanking the gagged demon stood Tana and Scarlet, the violins, ready to respond to any emergency.

The best and brightest of humanity have gathered to escort the Demon King.

It's safe to say that even if the former Demon King Valier were to return to life, he wouldn't be able to rescue his son from this situation; they were the best and brightest of humanity.

Everyone holds their breath as they watch the demonic figure in the distance.

He sees a demon in human form who, after being known as a warrior, is revealed to be a demon.

Is that really the devil?

Appearances are sometimes everything, and in a demon in human form, people only recognize the smell of humanity.

Could something be wrong?

That's what a lot of people who didn't know the details thought.

There's some kind of conspiracy that we don't know about.

Are you trying to kill a healthy warrior?

It was inevitable that some would come to that conclusion.

Regardless of the people's puzzlement, the convoy escorted the Demon King to the General Headquarters with a stern demeanor.

People were already waiting at the table set up in the main hall, and the demon sat on a wooden chair in the center of the open space.

Not a throne, not an overly shabby chair, but an ordinary chair, the kind you'd find in a temple classroom.

In the chairs where they had sat as students, Scarlett and Savior Tana stood, flanked by the one who had come to sit as a demon.

Olivia watched the spectacle through clenched teeth.

Gathered for interrogation.

And the manpower to guard it.

Surrounded by people, the demon sat still in his chair.

Reinhardt was once her daughter's fiancé and believed to be one of the heroes who would save the world.

But the one who was a demon, the emperor looked at him and said.

"Ungag him."

At that command, Scarlett carefully removed the gag from Reinhardt's mouth.

"From now on, I'm going to give the Devil one last chance at redemption."

"How to be a master of two holy objects."

"What is Akasha, the mysterious magic tool that can become a god, and what is its whereabouts."

"What you've been hoping for."

"If you meant what you said about wanting peace, how can you prove it."

"Last."

"Young devil."

"For everything, explain."

Reinhardt, the handcuffed demon, sits in his chair, looking around at his surroundings.

Olivia Ranze.

Ellen Artorius.

Bertus de Gradias.

Slowly stare into their faces.

The demon intuits something.

It's a rush, a rush, a rush.

It's like you've felt a certain destiny that you can't rebel against anymore.

He looks like he's realized something.

"That stuff, it doesn't matter anymore."

Tweet.

and.

The devil clucks his tongue.

"You wouldn't believe it anyway, you guys."

The arrogance of the situation made everyone's already serious faces even more serious.

It's like you've given up on everything, and now you're wondering where it all went.

It's still doom and gloom, but with an arrogant attitude, says the devil.

"They'll think I can't help but hate humans, and they won't believe I tried to save you."

"If I told you I did all this because I wanted peace, you wouldn't believe me."

"You killed my ancestor Valie, I'm his son, and the Darklands were destroyed, so it's only natural that I would hate humans."

"It doesn't make sense to me that I was trying to do something because I love people, because I wanted to save the world."

"I don't really hate humans."

"And staying at the temple. That was just a treat in itself."

"If they were in danger, I wanted to help them."

"I wanted to comfort them when they were sad."

"Two holy relics? Want me to tell you something fun?"

"Alsbringer only chooses those who are ready to sacrifice themselves for the world."

"Why I know something that even the Pope of the Order of Als doesn't know, I won't tell you because you won't believe me if I do."

"Anyway, I'm ready to die for you guys, and you're not going to believe it. Yeah, of course, you're not going to believe it."

"So now I'm not going to tell you the same old, same old, truth that you won't believe."

"So, I'm going to tell you a story that you're going to believe."

"I'd rather tell you the future than the truth, which you won't believe no matter how much I tell you."

"I told you that my men might activate Akasha for destruction to save me, so either kill me ASAP or let me go, and you did neither of those things."

"So the worst thing I expect to happen, the thing I was trying to prevent, is going to start happening."

The demon raises his head.

"Soon, every warp gate in the entire continent will be transformed into a portal to the Otherworld."

"The otherworldly monsters that came out of it will destroy your world."

The grim-eyed demon declares with a curse.

"So, be prepared."

Everyone held their breath at the sight of the Demon King's eyes.

\* \* \*

Temple Royal Class, second year, Class B dormitory.

-Bang!

Ludwig cocked his head at the sudden appearance of someone running out into the hallway.

"Uh....... Scarlett?"

"@Huck....... 허억......."

Scarlett, her red hair drenched in a cold sweat, was gasping for air as she looked at Ludwig.

As if something really bad has happened.

It was the same for Ludwig.

"No, right now you're here....... shouldn't you be here?"

He needs Scarlett by his side to control the demon's powers. And that interrogation would be underway now.

But now, Scarlett came running out into the hallway, still in her pajamas, sweating profusely.

"No, I saw you leave earlier, and I thought you were going to......?"

And sure enough, Ludwig had seen Scarlett leave the dormitory with a determined look on her face. But now, Scarlett was here.

Scarlett, hearing the words, looked at Ludwig, her face white, and shook her head.

"I'm....... It's not me......."

"What?"

"Who....... knocked me out and....... disguised himself as me......."

The closest thing to a demon right now was someone other than Scarlett.

\* \* \*

The guards in the interrogation room where Reinhardt had been held until now were now outnumbered.

The demon we needed to keep an eye on had moved on, and we'd already gotten all the information we could from the demon's minions who were imprisoned with him.

The Archmages and Swordmasters had all left, and the Temple's guards, not Shanapelle's knights, were now standing guard.

And right now, all the troops inside the cell were asleep, all under the curse of a demon.

-jerky

Then, two people enter the dungeon.

The cage opens, and the gray-haired woman sees two people standing in front of her.

Loyard had never seen Effinghauser and Roussinil in person.

But I think I knew what their expressions meant.

"It's our only chance."

"......."

"Let's go get Valerie."

Lucinil has unshackled Loyaar.

Staggering to his feet, Loyar tries to move his immobile limbs. It's been a long time in prison, but after a few stretches, Loyaar takes a deep breath.

"I'd like to ask you something."

Loyard looks back and forth between Effinghauser and Roussinil, as if waiting for someone to answer.

"The Rotary Club kids went to....... What happened?"

Lucinil didn't know what Loyar was asking.

"It's pretty obvious what happened to those who were perceived as collaborators of the devil."

At Effinghauser's words, Loyard nodded slowly.

"Adriana, who was a Temple student, is apparently being protected by Ellen's favors, but all the others were hanged."

"Oh....... Yeah......."

Loyar nodded.

"Well, at least I can die without regrets."

The gray-haired woman laughed.

Not at all pleased.

\* \* \*

Right next to him were the violins Tana and Scarlett.

Silence fell over the hall at the demon's shocking prediction of the future, especially Olivia, who stared at Reinhardt with wide eyes.

"The gate crisis is all about breaking warp gates. If you break all the warp gates on an entire continent, the gate crisis is over."

As if foreseeing a terrible fate, the demon looked as if he didn't doubt for a moment that the world would roll according to his word.

Bertus stares at the demon.

Really, was it right to let the devil go free?

If it was his plot to make that happen, he had no reason to tell them the answer.

The devil is talking about something that hasn't happened yet.

Everyone is confused as to whether the devil is causing this, or if he's really trying to save humanity.

Ellen stared at Reinhardt.

Problems caused by not trusting Reinhardt.

And, if Reinhardt's statement is true and it really does happen.

The source of the problem will be the Devil himself and his minions.

And he was to blame for not trusting Reinhardt.

-Bang!

The door was roughly thrown open by an impatient-looking Knight of the Shanapelle.

His complexion was almost blue, and everyone was puzzled.

Hurrying, almost running, toward the Emperor, the knight of Shanapelle whispered something in his ear.

The Demon King looks at the emperor's expression.

"Ah....... Looks like it's already started."

As if he knew what had happened by the change in his complexion, the demon laughed heartily.

"I mean, you should have trusted me......."

-goooooooooooooo

Very far away.

Vaguely.

Everyone heard the cries of an unnamed monster.

Everyone looks to the emperor, not the devil.

As if you've heard the story.

"At the warp gate....... unidentified monsters....... are appearing......."

The gate crisis has begun.

That wasn't the end of it.

"The sky is...... strange......."

A wizard from the Imperial Order of Mages, wary of the situation outside, enters and speaks with a pale face.

"Meteors are....... are raining down......."

The sky opens up and a meteor falls toward the temple.

Episode 447.

-Confectioner!

Antirrhinus watched from afar as a meteor shattered in a massive shockwave over the temple.

Time is broad daylight.

But as if the mirror of the heavens were shattering, meteors poured from the cracks in the sky that illuminated the vast void, falling toward the temple and shattering it.

"Shiloh, beautiful power......."

-Bang! Quack! Kwakkakkakkang!

The Temple's activated barriers were so strong and thick that they could hold back a meteorite that would have reduced a village to ashes.

Indeed, it deserved to be called the second safest place in the land of men.

-Kyaaaaah!

-Grrrrrr!

-꺄아아아악!

-Ahhhhh!

And Antirianus stared at the vast numbers of monsters pouring out of the warp gate, which was no longer its usual blue color, but a blazing inferno.

Heteromorphic monsters were pouring out, killing people.

Imaginary dimensions.

Clumsy creatures created in a dimension that doesn't exist, only to be thrust into the existing world to exist.

An incomplete Akasha is a recipe for disaster.

The destruction begins.

"This is more than I could have imagined......."

Antirrhinus watched the spectacle with satisfaction, as if he had been expecting more, but had gotten more than he bargained for.

-Woof!

Antirrhinus watches in awe as a meteor crashes into the temple.

\* \* \*

There was still silence in the General Headquarters.

The devil foresaw disaster, but it had already begun.

However, the Devil provides the answer to the catastrophe that began. He tells you how to fix it.

"This catastrophe would not have been limited to the ecliptic, but would have been continental."

"The bigger the gate, the more dangerous monsters will come out. So we should prioritize breaking the super-sized warp gate."

"And as you know, the ecliptic has the most warp gates of any continent."

"So, the longer we wait to act, the more people will die."

"Smaller warp gates won't produce as strong of a monster, but numbers are numbers, and small to medium-sized towns and strongholds that don't have the right troops or armor are better off abandoning."

"Most countries will probably cease to function, and the only ones that will remain functional will be the capitals of empires or stronghold cities like Cernstadt."

"We're going to have to secure those, and then we're going to have to clean up the gates that we didn't get to, one by one, and that's how we're going to do it."

"I like to move fast."

"If we move a minute late now, we have to think of it as a year or a decade late in rebuilding humanity later."

He didn't blame the humans for causing this mess.

The situation has already happened.

The Empire's most elite troops are gathered here.

The ecliptic is the continent with the most warp gates.

If they didn't act quickly, the scale of the disaster would reduce the ecliptic to ashes. Meteors were raining down to destroy the temple.

Everyone listened in stunned silence.

If they're plotting to destroy humanity, there's no reason why we shouldn't know about it.

The only way to know if that's true is to break the warp gate.

The disaster has begun.

When you don't know what's going on and why, the damage can be devastating over time.

Or is it because they know they're doomed until they're told?

No, there's no reason you should.

If the Empire is fooled into thinking that this event only happened in the ecliptic, it will later have to face a world that has been reduced to ashes.

It's hard to reach them when all the warp gates have stopped firing.

I don't need to tell you that this catastrophe is continental in scope, because it's only going to get worse with time.

Everyone in the room has a hunch.

The Devil's men may have done this, but the Devil really didn't want this to happen.

That's why they're giving humanity the answers.

The emperor is furious.

You may not believe everything else, but you should take the devil's word for a catastrophe that has already happened.

If the demon was truly for the good of humanity, you can't kill it. There might be something else he knows.

But we can't let it go either.

Something is bound to happen, but if the ecliptic collapses, the empire is over.

However, with a presumed catastrophe threatening entire continents across the ecliptic, the forces that can be devoted to the Demon King are limited.

"Lord Tana, you will remain with the First Battalion."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"Shanapelle, all but the 1st Battalion, and the Imperial Mages are following me."

Demons are one thing, but now the ecliptic is about to evaporate.

If the best of the best were to stand by and watch from this spot, the empire would be lost.

The troops trickle out like an ebb and flow. The Emperor and Bertus are gone, too.

Olivia Ranze also looks at the popes of the Five Great Houses with a stony expression.

"We need to deal with this situation, and we need you and the pope to deal with this situation quickly."

Olivia says this with a stern look on her face, but every pope and even the head of the Crusader Knights knows what her intentions are.

I watch the corners of Olivia's mouth twitch in a serious but subtle way.

I felt like I knew what she was thinking in this crazy situation.

But just as the emperor had to leave, we couldn't just stand by and watch.

Right now, the Imperium needs the power of the paladins, priests, and popes of this place.

You need to do something before the damage spreads any further.

"Let's go."

The paladins and the popes of the Five Great Houses left.

Only the Crusader Knights, including Elayon Bolton, and the troops he commanded remained in place.

Soon, there were only a few people left.

Scarlett and Savior Tana standing right next to Reinhardt.

Olivia Ranze.

Ellen Artorius.

But with no idea what was going to happen to the Demon King, the best of Shanapelle's best were on hand, as well as Elion Bolton.

Despite the circumstances, we were well prepared for any possible raids or contingencies.

Even if Olivia Ranze was going to do something out of character, she could have handled it.

Of course.

That is, unless you're Olivia Ranze and you're the only one who's willing to do something out of the ordinary.

Time passes in silence.

With meteors raining down on your temple and monsters rising from the ecliptic.

They were enduring a tense time, with only the duty of keeping an eye on the devil.

Olivia watched the situation with an unreadable expression on her face, while Ellen bit her lip and watched the situation.

Saviolin Tana stood beside Reinhardt, holding on to her seat to keep from falling.

-Bang!

Suddenly, the entrance gates exploded open, and the troops guarding the outside poured in.

They were all dead, deeply wounded.

And in walked a stern-looking middle-aged man.

"EpinHauser......?"

Saviolin Tana stared in disbelief at Eppinhauser as he slowly walked in, sword drawn.

Also.

-Snarl

As usual, steam gathered in the air, and this time a silver-haired girl appeared from the other side.

"Is she......?"

"!"

A silver-haired girl in the first year of Royal Class.

Olivia and Ellen couldn't help but squint at the sudden appearance of the girl.

Somehow.

Upon entering, a girl who was close to Reinhardt threw her hands in the air.

-Kwagagagak!

In an instant, countless spears of ice from the ceiling slammed into the ground, sealing off the path to nowhere.

"This is....... What......!"

That wasn't all.

Suddenly, Scarlett, who was beside Reinhardt, picked up the chair Reinhardt was tied to and sent it flying toward Effinghauser.

The flying demon widened his eyes.

"Sarke......sarke......?"

A red-haired girl, speaking in a foreign voice.

"You must survive, degradation."

Reinhardt gritted his teeth as his eyes locked with something that was scarlet but not scarlet.

-Bam!

"Boom!"

Eppinhauser grabbed the chair the demon was tied to and set it down, breaking the restraints with a few swipes of his sword, and shattering the cuffs with his bare hands.

"Teacher......?"

Reinhardt looks at him in disbelief.

"We don't have time to talk about a lot of things."

Still stunned by the lack of recognition, Effinghauser spilled the beans on how he got it back.

The silver sword in Effinghauser's hand burned with blue magic.

Swordmaster, says Epinhouser.

"Go, Reinhardt."

-Bang! Ka-kang! kang!

"Are you sure the order is......?"

"It has nothing to do with order."

With that, Effinghauser stood in front of Reinhardt.

Something unrelated to the order.

Reinhardt was even more appalled by Epinhauser's words. True to his nature, Effinghauser did not add anything ticklish.

Lucinil was already fending off the mages and knights attacking him.

Tana doesn't understand what's going on, but she's already lunging for the EpinHauser.

-Bang!

However, before Tana's charge could reach Eppinhauser, she was hit by someone else's charge and rolled to the ground.

"Loyaar......?"

A short, gray-haired woman, dressed in tattered rags, looks at the demon and says, "When did you get released?

"Degradation."

-Udup

"Right now, you just need to think about staying alive."

The demon gritted his teeth as he watched Loyar turn into a white wolf.

Chanapelle's No. 1.

The Crusader Commander and his immediate troops.

Power is still a disadvantage.

Whether or not the Devil intended this catastrophe, if, as the Devil says, it was planned by his minions, it was bound to happen eventually.

Whether the devil is good or evil is not a matter for judgment at this point.

The Empire had no choice but to withdraw its troops.

Therefore, the scheduled rescue operation has begun.

Saviolin Tana is not to be trifled with.

Perhaps the Emperor had left the strongest of mankind in this position, just in case something happened.

A knight of Shanapelle who fulfills his duty, must fulfill his duty.

She performs the command.

"Don't let the devil get away!"

At Tana's shout, they all start to move.

Behind Reinhardt, Eppinhauser and Lykanslof blocked the way.

The demon staggers to his feet.

The shackles are off.

He sees Sarkegar, a shape-shifter, flying around and attacking the wizards, Lucinil, a vaporous figure who appears from nowhere and attacks with magic, and Loyaar and Effinghauser, who fend off the charging knights.

Olivia's face is set, and she seems to know what she's doing.

-Thump!

Olivia Ranze, in full stride, runs like a bird toward Reinhardt.

Soon, Olivia Ranze, who had caught up to Reinhardt, grabbed his arm and slipped away.

Ellen Artorius watched this spectacle of disaster, chaos, and demonic escape unfold, taking no sides.

\* \* \*

[Special Achievement 'Complete Cause and Effect']

[Earn 50,000 achievement points].

[Perk "Buy Status" is enabled].

[As of now, you can exchange 5,000 Achievement Points for 1 point of Status].

"Run. Run, Reinhard. You have to run."

Olivia grabs my hand and we run.

There's no time to waste.

Crying out that you don't have to do this to save me doesn't do any good.

I thought it was best to die.

I figured it would be best if I died so this wouldn't happen.

However, I didn't die.

In the midst of doubt and suspicion, people didn't kill me, or couldn't kill me.

My list of people who wanted to believe in me as much as those who doubted me and felt betrayed was clumsily lengthened, and this is what happened.

I tried to solve something by dying, but it didn't work out.

So this is what happened

I'm not going to die in despair, blaming it all on me.

I tried to prevent the worst with my death.

I tried to accomplish something with death.

However, I did not die when I should have.

Now, nothing can be accomplished by death.

So I'm not going to force myself to die.

Live.

Alive.

You don't know what you're going to do when you're alive.

But.

A life exchanged for many deaths.

If it's a life you're forced to trade for an immeasurable number of lives.

You can't give it away.

I cannot die for nothing, and waste the lives of countless others who will die for nothing.

Nor can I waste the lives that will die because of me.

I don't know if I'm frustrated, angry, or sad about the situation I'm in.

It can't be killed.

I need to stay alive and find something I can do.

I can't just flounder in despair and tell myself that I was useless, that I shouldn't have existed.

That was the case a little while ago, but not anymore.

What I saw was something I had never imagined, even when I imagined hell.

-currrrr

A crack had opened in the barrier surrounding the temple, and meteors were pouring through it, hitting the ground.

In the skies beyond the temple, unidentifiable flying beasts flitted about, spewing searing flames or terrifyingly white frost.

This was a catastrophe of a different order of magnitude than Raziern's demonic raids.

The world is ending.

The gate event happened even earlier than originally planned.

There's no point in regretting that nothing would have happened if you had stayed still.

You can't go back in time and wish you hadn't done anything.

You have to move forward.

You don't know what to do in front of it.

I have to live.

I run with Olivia.

Who will die in the fight and who will survive.

The knights of Shanapelle follow me, their bodies ravaged by years of imprisonment, but I must do what I can.

The concept of buying status with achievement points.

The most important ability is Horsepower.

The higher your Magic number, the more Magic enhancements will increase your overall physical abilities.

In other words, an increase in one stat has the added effect of increasing all of your other physical abilities. As such, horsepower is effectively the ultimate stat.

Invest achievement points in horsepower numbers.

In no time at all, the 10 percent increase in horsepower will take you from A-rank to S-rank in no time at all.

That's a lot of horsepower for an archmage.

For a few more points, you could have a monster with horsepower that would surpass even Savior Tana, but we'll hold off on that for now.

Then I'll be told that this filthy demon was hiding his power too.

I don't have time to think about that.

The instantaneous surge in hp revitalizes my tired body, along with the power boost. I may not be eating well, but my physical abilities are not compromised.

You need to leave the temple.

Even if you don't know what you're going to do when you get out there, you need to get out there.

But no matter how much horsepower I've gained, it's Shanapelle's knights, the Swordmasters, who are following me.

Soon, they catch up with me.

You don't know if you can win with a pincer attack or not.

Even if you use Alsbringer, you'll be outnumbered. Even if you fight with Olivia.

I'm going to be captured and killed.

As is?

Will all the sacrifices be for nothing?

Before me running like that.

In the streets of an abyssal temple.

As if in my path, someone was standing in my way.

-Woosh! Woosh! Kurrrrrr!

"Is she......?"

"Liana......."

Liana de Granz glared at me, blue sparks flying from her body.

Yes.

Now that you know I'm a demon, you can't forgive me.

Rather, I was wondering why it hadn't appeared sooner.

It seemed like a fait accompli, that Riana would block my way in order to kill me.

Blitz is instantaneous.

It's almost impossible to avoid.

Even at the height of her power, Riana's charge is unavoidable. Even if you manage to hold out with your enchanted shields, you'll be caught in the pursuit of the Shanapelle Knights.

Die, or be captured.

From her blitz I cannot escape.

And just like that, just as I was about to stop my desperate steps.

A bright blue light shot from Riana's outstretched hand in a fierce current.

-Quack! Quack!

As the shockwave tore through the atmosphere, Olivia and I froze.

A lightning bolt whizzed past my cheek.

Not me.

-Crack!

-Crack!

I fired at the knights of Shanapelle who were chasing me.

Olivia and I could only stare in disbelief as the knights were struck by the blast and either bounced off or writhed on the spot.

"What are you doing, asshole, why don't you get over here?!"

Riana exclaims, her face crumpling in anger.

a.

No way.

Did I know that?

Since when?

How?

As Olivia and I approached, Riana wordlessly began to rally the troops.

-Kurung! kurrrrr! Kurrrrr!

Dozens of sparks flashed in the air, and in an instant, a massive lightning bolt struck the fallen knights, creating a storm of lightning around them.

-Crack!

The lights exploded, and the bricks on the ground exploded.

The intense light destroyed objects and struck the fallen knights relentlessly.

The fierce, uncontrolled glow that radiated in all directions from his rage said it all.

Riana knows it all.

第448季节

A few days ago.

After breakfast, Herriot was taken to Riana's room and told a shocking story.

"Reinhardt is....... not?"

"Uh."

The Demon's Raid on Raziern, where Duke Granz was killed.

It hadn't been caused by a demonic attack, and she knew Reinhardt hadn't planned it.

"I found out a while ago, too. It was so weird to say the least, I think my mom kept looking into it."

"So you did....... Then....... What happened?"

"It was the Empire that killed my father."

"......what?"

Riana's mother, Duchess Yelena de Granz, was not on good terms with her husband, but she was not immune to the shock of his death.

Why the devil did it.

Why she had to die in that place, why her husband had to die.

The Duchess of Granz could not help but know her husband's proclivities and his character better than anyone else.

After a long and drawn-out investigation of her own, she found out.

What my husband has been doing.

Who, where, and what they were doing when they died.

Thus, we see that the devil had no reason to do such a thing.

Why the Empire is so unenthusiastic about investigating the case.

The circumstances made Duchess Yelena de Granz realize that this was an imperial stunt.

Then he told his daughter, who had gone mad with revenge against the demon.

The real enemy is not the devil, but the empire.

The Empire has killed Duke Granz and blamed it on the Devil.

There was nothing Riana could do.

While the devil is an opaque and powerful enemy, the empire is a clear and overwhelming enemy.

The prince and princess were classmates, and she could lay her hands on them, but Riana didn't want to settle for that.

I want to bring down an empire.

I wanted to kill my father, to peel back the thick veneer of empire from his impassive face at the funeral.

First, you need to build up your strength.

His own power is a force, but he must align himself with a force that can bring down an empire, or so he thought.

Then we learned that Reinhardt was the devil.

Shocking facts aside, Riana sees possibilities.

Together, you may be able to bring down an empire.

Reinhardt is about to die.

"I'm going to save Reinhardt at all costs."

When the demon dies, so does the possibility of empire collapse.

So instead of being shocked by the facts at hand, Riana focused on the first thing she needed to do to get revenge.

"Harriet, what are you going to do?"

Herriot was stunned by Liana's words.

That was the most incomprehensible and sad thing the devil had ever done.

The death of Duke Granz in the Raziern raid.

Even if he did have a reason, why did he have to kill Riana's father, even if it was a good reason, could he even understand it?

That's what Herriot was thinking.

But that was the Empire's own doing, and while we don't know what happened to the demonic raids that followed, we can be sure of at least one thing.

Reinhard has nothing to do with the death of Riana's father, Duke Granz.

If anything, they're being framed.

I didn't have a lot of time.

There is no telling when Reinhardt will be killed by the Empire.

I wanted to believe Reinhardt.

You don't need a lot of evidence to convince you of something you want to believe.

"I don't know how to do this, but......."

I believe because I want to believe.

I don't know how to do that, or if it's even possible.

It's just the two of you, you don't know what to do, and if you fail, you die.

"Me too, let's do it together."

Knowing it was an irreversible decision, Herriot decided to save Reinhardt.

\* \* \*

And now.

Herriot and Riana's time was short, but they had a plan.

But when meteors begin raining down from the sky and the cries of an unidentified monster are heard outside the temple, they realize that something bad is happening.

I had to choose.

I wonder if this is because Reinhard is a really evil demon.

Should we trust Reinhardt despite this happening.

Liana chose the latter because she wanted revenge, and Herriot chose the former because he still believed Reinhardt was innocent.

Reinhardt, who had somehow managed to escape despite all his plans falling apart, joined Riana with Olivia Ranze.

Now that all of our plans had fallen apart, we had to improvise and react to every situation.

-Koooow!

A meteor slammed into the barrier above the Temple, sending a massive shockwave that shook the ground.

The pursuers are down, exposed to Riana's blast, but not dead.

He was still squirming and trying to get up somehow.

Herriot stretched out his hand, and the ground began to lift as if torn from beneath him, raining down on the knights of Shanapelle.

-Currrrrr!

In an instant, the knights were buried in the vomit, as if covered by a rocky mountain.

Bursting out of the alley, Herriot rushed over to Reinhardt, who didn't understand this sudden outburst from Liana and Herriot, and grabbed his hand.

"I don't know what's going on, but....... I don't know, but......."

Herriot was sobbing, both because the situation had gotten out of hand and because this was a living hell.

I believe in Reinhardt.

And from this moment on, you must part ways with everyone except those who are here at this moment in time.

Father.

Mother too.

Brothers.

Classmates.

She renounced her title as Grand Duchess of Saint-Thuan.

Leaving behind everything they had, everything they should have, everything they knew.

I'm betting on one thing: I believe in Reinhardt.

"I will....... I will believe you......."

He doesn't know if it's worth it or if he should be doing this.

"You were trying to save everyone. None of this happened....... that you didn't mean to do....... I'll believe that......."

I decided to take Reinhardt at his word that he wanted to save everyone.

So at a time when so many people were turning away from Reinhardt, Herriot decided to stand by him, hoping that she could be his strength.

"Let's go, Reinhardt."

Olivia leads the way.

Shanapelle's Swordmasters, buried in the rubble, could be heard breaking through the stone.

The real monsters are the humans.

Even when the world deserves to end, humans conquer the monsters and build civilization once again.

They deserve to be called monsters.

-Thump! Thump!

Humans are strong.

More than anything else in the world.

More than any other race.

Humans are the most frightening, humans are the strongest.

\* \* \*

Temple fared better.

"Hey, but you, what the hell is going on, we had an idea, but now that things are like this, what the hell is......!"

Riana asked me, looking up at the meteor shower in the sky.

"Later, later!"

But I didn't have time for a conversation right now.

Meteors are raining down, but the temple's barriers are catching most of them, and students are running away screaming, but there are no monsters on the loose like outside the temple.

The knights of Chanapelle were after us again.

"Sis, pick me up!"

"Ace! Okay!"

Riana was the fittest, so Olivia nervously carried her along for the ride.

-Bang! Quack!

The Imperial Mages were casting offensive spells against us, but Herriot was able to deal with them.

If you run away, where.

Where to go and what to do.

I'm the devil.

Olivia, Riana, and Harriet will never be able to return to the world of humans again.

I couldn't help but think about it, even when I wasn't thinking about the future.

How the hell am I supposed to be responsible for them?

The good news is that all the combat-capable troops were outside the temple.

Since we couldn't climb over the collapsed building, we had to navigate around the blockage in real time, with Riana stopping the Swordmasters in their tracks and Herriot putting up a barrier there once again.

"@AndreaMcGee....... 허억......."

Herriot eventually reached the limit of his physical abilities, and it seemed like his body was starting to take a toll.

You only need to cross the temple gate.

You need to get over it, teleport away, and get somewhere.

If you encounter any of the Council's Lord Vampires outside the Temple, you will be able to escape the ecliptic via mass teleportation.

Will Sarkozy, Roussinil, Loyard, and Effinghauser be safe?

Obviously, this gate situation had to be caused by Elise.

I wonder if Eleris will be okay.

What was I thinking when I went live with Akasha, and how do I feel about it now?

All I could think about was the horrible things that had happened.

He somehow managed to fend off the pursuit and reach the main entrance to the temple.

We just need to break through that door.

I could see Ellen in front of him, wearing a cloak of flame and a saccharine sword.

"......."

Ellen Artorius was blocking the way for the four of us.

It's as if you're trying to be the head of the floodgates.

Ellen was blocking our path.

We don't know what path they took to get ahead of us.

However, Ellen stood in our way.

First and foremost, that sword.

I think it's lime, but it's a different kind of black than I've ever seen before.

"Get out of the way. Are you going to be the last one standing?"

Olivia grits her teeth and glares at Ellen.

Riana bit her lip and looked at Ellen.

In this moment, we all felt it.

No matter what the four of us do, we can't get past Ellen Artorius.

It was almost an instinctive gut reaction.

The magical enhancement around Ellen's body felt completely different than it did now.

How and when did Ellen become a Swordmaster?

But it was clear that if Ellen, clutching her blackened ramen, tried to stop us, none of us would be able to take her on.

Ellen's sword is stronger than Olivia's.

The Sun God's cloak will block Riana's charge.

Not even Herriot's magic would be able to penetrate Ellen's defenses.

Ellen has two-way resistance, so my words will not work.

Ellen looks at me with a calm expression.

Ellen, wearing the cloak of a sun god and a dark sword that looks like it's stolen a strand of night, looks at me and asks.

"Reinhardt. Answer me one question."

"......Say."

Ellen takes a deep breath and looks at me.

"What, you didn't get it?"

At those words, I felt a shiver run down my spine.

"You should have gotten it."

The other three don't know what you're talking about.

Only I know.

Rapelt, the cloak of the sun god.

Why didn't I get that?

"You should have gotten it, obviously."

If you're the devil, and you've been using me all this time.

I shouldn't have passed up the chance to have three holy relics.

That seemed to be Ellen's last question.

On this hellish map, where my minions are trying to destroy the world to save me, and meteors are falling on my temple.

When I'm pretty sure it was my men who caused it.

For the last time, Ellen seemed to try to believe me.

The four of us must leave the temple.

Probably, it won't come back.

I look at the transformed laments.

A sword forged in tears.

In his grief, Ramen has come to embrace an unidentified power.

It's a sword that looks like it can cut through anything.

If grief makes Ellen stronger.

If that's what it takes to survive this hell, this catastrophe of waking up too early.

Ellen wonders if she should be sad all the time.

No, beyond that sadness.

You should be able to hate me so much that you can use the true power of the Sun God's cloak, which is manifested in hatred.

If yes.

Should I deliberately lie to Ellen?

"I am......."

"No."

I started to say something. Ellen shook her head.

"Just, I don't want to hear it."

Ellen sees me.

"Again, I think you're trying to lie."

Ellen shakes her head, as if to say that she won't listen if it's too painful to hear.

"If that's the case, I'm not listening."

Ellen sees me.

No, his gaze was a little further away than that.

I looked behind me and saw the Swordmasters of Shanapelle closing in on me.

"Go, Reinhard."

Inflection points in history.

The inflection point in history that occurred when I didn't take the rappel. I could see it clearly now.

I should have been dead by now.

If you were given a lapel by Ellen.

I would be dead now, at Ellen's hands.

The fact that I didn't accept the lapel remained the last doubt in Ellen's mind.

It remained as something of a last hope.

Now, instead of killing me, it made me make a different choice.

When it was clear that my men had caused the catastrophe that brought the world to its knees, I made the choice to save the source, not kill it.

Ellen rushes past me, blocking the knights of Shanapelle from pursuing me.

"You....... What are you going to do......."

"It's okay."

Ellen stood in the way of the knights, gripping her sword.

"I'm not going to kill you, no one."

Against the Swordmasters of Shanapelle, Ellen says she won't die, but she won't kill them either.

As such, Ellen seemed to believe she could take them all down.

"So, go."

Will we ever meet again.

Is it possible.

If we meet again.

I wonder if it will ever be the same.

"From start to finish. It's all my fault."

I'm regretting it.

If you trusted me, if we had talked a little earlier, or before it all came to this.

This wouldn't have happened, or so I thought.

"I'm sorry I didn't believe you."

Just like I think that if I hadn't done anything, the gate wouldn't have happened.

Ellen says that if she hadn't done anything, none of this would have happened, and if she had trusted me, none of this would have happened.

He seemed to have the same kind of thoughts as me.

Finally, Ellen looks back at me.

Not just me, but Olivia, Riana, and Harriet.

Look at everyone once.

Even in this situation, I see people who believe in me and want to follow me.

Seeing others who have done something before you that you haven't.

"I am....... I don't deserve to like you."

They didn't believe me when it mattered most.

So here's what happened.

So Ellen seemed to have decided that I shouldn't even be allowed to have a heart.

With those words, Ellen sprints off toward the pursuing knights of Shanapelle.

We're leaving.

Ellen stays here, trying to stop the pursuit of me.

Live.

Me, too.

When and where we'll meet again, and under what circumstances, I don't know.

Even if a future where we point knives at each other is the only future we have left.

Until then, let's hope we don't kill each other.

I ran toward the entrance of the temple.

Episode 449.

I had the wrong idea.

I'm not lying to you.

I didn't do it for the sake of knowing, for the sake of deception, for the sake of revenge.

They knew and loved it.

He knew it all and was generous.

Someone who can't help but hate me.

Who's weird for not killing me on the spot.

He liked me.

That simple thought, that simple answer.

He must have liked Reinhardt more than Reinhardt liked him.

It's one thing to like your classmates, it's another to like your enemy's family.

I liked someone I couldn't like, and I couldn't believe it.

When it matters most, only once.

I just needed to trust you.

It doesn't, and the world is about to end.

It's all your fault.

It was caused by the Demon King's minions, who possessed a strange artifact called Akasha.

But Reinhardt didn't want this to happen.

If Reinhardt hadn't been caught.

Unless there's an extreme situation where the Devil's minions have to make this happen to save Reinhardt.

This didn't happen.

If yes.

In the end, you're the one who brought this on yourself by not trusting Reinhardt when it mattered most.

In the end, you're the one who caused this, not the devil.

Because.

It's all your fault.

It was a difference of just one day.

The clue was at hand, and Reinhardt was not on the ecliptic at the time.

If you held out for a day.

If you had waited a day and asked Reinhardt everything first.

This didn't happen.

Because.

This is all your own fault.

The accumulation of misconceptions and lies had become so tangled that I didn't know what to believe, and time dragged on and on.

One day of miscommunication and mistrust led to all of this.

That broke everything.

Riana, Olivia, and Harriet were willing to trust Reinhardt in this situation.

I didn't believe it myself.

If the world ends.

Your biggest responsibility is to yourself, not to the devil's minions.

Ellen thinks so.

I don't know what Reinhardt's dream was, but I don't deserve to like him any more than he deserves to like me, because I'm the one who decisively destroyed it.

The sinner of the world.

I am a sinner to Reinhard.

I.

We must take responsibility for this situation.

By death, or something else.

Ellen Artorius must be held accountable.

-Bam!

"Boom!"

"Ellen, what do you think you're doing!"

In front of the knights of Shanapelle, Ellen broke the third sword, as if to say that she would not let anyone leave the Temple.

The Swordmasters of Shanapelle were horrified to see Ellen Artorius wielding a Voidblade that could shatter and cut through an Auror blade at the mere touch.

"Back off, I don't want to hurt you."

"If you keep this up, you'll lose the Demon to....... You'll lose him!"

"Don't miss it, because I'm telling you to."

Even with five Swordmasters, Ellen had a feeling that if he crossed the line she had set for him, she'd blow his head off with her Voidblade, not his sword.

Ellen's skills are impressive, but the power of the Voidblade Ramen is such that even Swordmasters struggle with its absolute cutting power.

Combined with the Sun God's holy relic, Ellen's defenses did not allow the Swordmasters to attack in the slightest.

The knights of Shanapelle begin to retreat.

-keeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!

Through the broken barrier, flying monsters begin to enter the temple.

"We're not chasing demons, we're killing monsters."

The world might end because you can't trust your crush.

Ellen Artorius became the protagonist of that ridiculous situation.

How responsible would you be if the world ended?

Probably.

It might be all you have.

I'm not supposed to like Reinhardt anymore, I'm not supposed to be like that.

Now that she has made up her mind, Ellen must do something else. She can't allow herself to help Reinhardt. That's for the people who believe in Reinhard.

There's no place for me there.

Because you don't deserve it.

So you should be doing something else.

The only other thing you can do.

Taking responsibility for the situation.

A world that's falling apart because of you, and you have to hold it together.

You must protect a world that may be doomed.

I know that can't be atonement.

There's nothing else you can do about it.

Earn Reinhardt's trust again, build a relationship with him again.

I shouldn't want that.

That's what Ellen thought.

\* \* \*

I thought I was in for an even more abysmal experience outside the temple gates than inside.

However, the situation wasn't as dire as I thought it would be.

-currr

The massive warp gate in front of the Temple Gate had already been destroyed.

The temple was home to some of humanity's most powerful forces, so they had to act fast.

Normally, the archmages of Shanapelle and the Imperial Mages are sent on missions across the continent. But now, due to my presence, they were gathered in the ecliptic.

Monsters are on the loose, the streets are littered with corpses and collapsed buildings, and people are running screaming.

However, the entire ecliptic did not appear to be in danger of collapse.

The flying monsters were constantly being shot down by lightning bolts, fireballs, or unidentified magic from the ground.

The Emperor chose to drastically reduce the number of troops on my side and deal with the catastrophe in the ecliptic.

It also seemed to understand and accept my point that we need to break the very large warp gates first.

While it's nice to see less damage on the ecliptic, it also means that provincial strongholds will suffer more because of the influx of troops.

An empire can't be in every field, every place.

As the ecliptic quickly stabilizes, the damage across the continent will be even greater.

And it's not in my best interest for the chaos of the ecliptic to stabilize quickly.

We must escape the ecliptic.

Fortunately, the guards, as well as the elite of the Empire and the Crusaders, were busy dealing with the situation, and the area around the monster-free Temple Gate was quiet, though there were signs of destruction.

-curl!

A crack appeared in the air, from which a woman with auburn hair soon emerged.

"Degradation!"

Elise appeared and hugged me fiercely.

"Are you okay?"

"......."

She bit her lip, unable to find the words to express her concern.

Elise did what only she can do: she fired up Akasha.

Without causing this level of chaos, there would be no way our overstretched forces could save me.

And as if that weren't enough, I wouldn't have gotten out the front door of the Temple without the unexpected help of Olivia, Harriet, Liana, and Ellen.

"First, you need to leave."

Eleris said, her eyes trembling, as if her own heart or thoughts were not worth speaking of.

Everyone was a little wary of Elise because they didn't know who she was.

"That person is......?"

But as far as Herriot was concerned, I had seen Eleris. The one I was supporting at Richie's grave.

I look at Harriet and say, "Because the person who lent me so much magic is here again.

"I don't have time to go into details, I'll talk to you after we get out of here, whatever."

At my words, Harriet nodded with a stony expression.

-Kaaaaaah!

-Grrrrrr!

The cries of nameless monsters filled the air.

-Ahhhhhh!

-God's judgment has fallen!

The cries of people driven mad by fear echoed everywhere.

"South of the ecliptic, Galarsh and Leruen are casting mass teleport and waiting, if you can make it that far......."

How much did it run.

Some of the articles that seemed to be scrambling to deal with the monsters found us.

"Scotra Kelton......."

We ran into Scotra Kelton's unit, the leader of Shanapelle's 3rd Battalion.

He was there during the interrogation just now.

Can we break through the knights of Shanapelle, even if they include Elise?

Seeing the look on their faces, Elise opened her arms to wrap around us and bite us back.

Scotra Kelton stares at us.

The demon has escaped.

As a knight of Shanapelle, he would have been obligated to prevent our escape.

The knights, including the Swordmaster, slowly make their way toward us.

"Jae-hyun, I'm......."

"Shut up."

What Elise is trying to do.

I know what I want.

"Don't try to find a grave in front of me."

It's pretty obvious what Elise wants.

We can't just let them die.

Although she's not actually my mother.

Ever since I came to this world, Eleris has been like a mother to me.

Just because a bean fails.

Just because the wind is down.

I opened the gates of destruction with my own hands.

I have no intention of letting them rest in death.

You have to live a little longer.

Like I could have solved everything by doing nothing, but I didn't know that and ended up creating this crazy situation.

As if to force myself to live this life that I would nevertheless trade for countless others.

Elyse must live, too.

You're alive and you have to do something.

Even if you can't pay for your sins, it would be cowardly to try to escape it all with death.

You can't pay for your sins with death.

I had no intention of letting Elise find a place to die.

Watching the upcoming Swordmasters, including Scotra Kelton.

Hold the flame of the day.

"I said it's something that responds to dark emotions."

It is an inauspicious object that reacts more intensely to killing, hatred, and anger, Eleris said as she handed me the flame.

This emotion I'm feeling right now must be a dark one.

No, it's more like the abyss itself than the darkness.

Despair, anger, and pain.

The compulsion to live nonetheless.

I must live in despair in the midst of destruction, not knowing what to do with the position I have created.

I don't even know what I'm feeling right now, only that it's darker than anything I've ever felt in my life.

I hold the flame of the day.

Capturing the power of self-suggestion.

With the power of words.

A spark of hope, representing my despair at the moment.

To the Essence of the Flame.

"Burn."

command.

-Crunch!

"Boom!"

"This is....... What!"

A great barrier of flame rose between the Swordmaster and us, threatening to melt the world.

Where the barrier of flame had risen, the earth melted into lava.

"Let's go."

A barrier of flames stands between me and my enemies.

We ran south.

\* \* \*

The Zodiacal Gradient's vigilance was broken.

We were able to cope with the monsters pouring through the warp gate, but we didn't have the resources to catch a demon running to escape the middle of the ecliptic.

Scotra Kelton's troops were eventually forced to stop chasing demons and focus on taking out the monsters that were slaughtering civilians.

In exchange for finding the demon.

The price humanity paid for not believing in the Devil was bitter.

-currrrr

The collapsed General Headquarters building, the remains of the Great Hall.

Saviolin Tana was stymied by Effinghauser and Loyard.

Effinghauser, Loyard, Sarkozy, and Roussinil.

They paid the price for stalling.

Lucinil was incapacitated, his limbs bound in magical chains, Sarkegar, whose shapeshifting abilities annoyed everyone, was bound in a spatial bond, and Loyaar was groaning in his human form with blood all over his body.

And.

Savior Tana watched as Eppinhauser lay bleeding in the rubble of a collapsed building, a tempesta lodged in his abdomen.

"Why."

Saviolin Tana's voice was shaking.

"Why did you have to do this, Effinghauser?"

As far as she knew, Effinghauser was a patriot. More than anyone else, he loved the Empire and wanted to protect it.

After joining Shanapelle and being active in the organization, at some point he decided that he wanted to help train his successor, so he became a teacher in the Temple Royal class instead of Shanapelle.

Having seen Epinhauser up close, Saviolin Tana was convinced of his sincerity.

Then he sided with the devil.

Demonic forces can do that. They are demons.

But it was incomprehensible to Saviolin Tana that Effinghauser, who was human and loved the Empire more than anyone else, would make such a choice.

She was the one who struck the blow, but she was also the one who felt the most confused.

"Why did you do this, when you were on the side of the Empire more than anyone else?"

"......."

Effinghauser wipes the blood from his forehead and looks up at Savior Tana.

"He also....... More than anyone else....... of the Empire....... was on the side of humanity......."

"......The king?"

Effinghauser nodded wordlessly.

The words that the Devil did not wish for destruction, Saviolin Tana could not yet fully accept.

After all, it was the beginning of a catastrophe that threatened to end the world. No matter how much you say the devil taught you the solution, it's not true.

But Epinhauser was Reinhardt's teacher.

At least, he'd been watching Reinhardt longer than she had.

"No way, did you already know that Reinhardt was a demon?"

"......."

Epinhauser didn't answer.

We're not the kind of people who make things up as we go along.

The fact that he was able to do something so incomprehensible must have been due to his own conviction and willpower.

He even stood up to the strongest man in the world, Saviolin Tana, even though he knew he would die.

He would not have dug his grave in a meaningless place.

As he lies bleeding to death, Effinghauser gives a subtle smile.

"And......."

She's seen a lot of Effinghauser, but this was the first time she'd seen him laugh.

"The teacher is....... seeking disciples is......."

The junior, who always made a grim impression, dies a slow death.

He says, dying.

"Would it be so....... that special......."

As if you only did things because you had to.

Saviolin Tana watched Epinhauser's breath catch in his throat, until the end.

"......."

Lately, she's been having doubts about everything she's built.

Reinhardt.

Demon.

Humans who believe in demons, who follow demons, even though they are demons.

There are those who believe in and love the devil even though they shouldn't.

The many forms and facets of the demon she had seen.

While watching the demon say that he didn't want destruction, that he wanted to save the humans.

If he wanted to divide the humans, he should have said that the Demon's attack on Raziern was an act of the Empire, but he never mentioned it.

And, in a situation where it's almost certain that if you really believed the devil, this wouldn't have happened.

"And now....... I don't know anything."

Saviolin Tana felt lost.

Episode 450.

A gate event is an outpouring of monsters from a warp gate.

A gate outbreak must be well underway before the monster spreads to the outlying areas. Unless it's been a while since the outbreak, towns outside of the city center or without even a warp gate will be rather peaceful.

And even if it's small, it has to be city-sized to have a warp gate.

In the early stages of the outbreak, the most dangerous places are large cities along the ecliptic.

With Eleris' guidance, my party made it to the location of Galarsh and Leruen, who were casting Mass Teleport, and we were able to reach a forested area very far from the ecliptic.

Antirrhinus doesn't know what he's doing.

However, we've arrived in a tranquil green forest that has nothing to do with the catastrophic events unfolding on the ecliptic.

Me, Olivia, Riana, Herriot, Elise, Lerouen, and Galash.

The three who came to my rescue turned white at the sight of the long-eared Leruen and the orcish vampire Galarsh.

"You....... Are you real......."

Riana froze and pointed a finger at me.

"Now you're going to say, 'Oh, you're the devil, and you knew it, didn't you?"

"No....... Yes, but......."

Riana stared blankly at the gray, hulking orc vampire.

"Elf....... You were there......."

Herriot was staring at Lerouen with his mouth open in a different way.

I didn't think I'd make it out alive, but I did make it out of the ecliptic.

We're in a tranquil, peaceful landscape in the woods with the chirping of nameless birds, but it's not really peaceful.

Monsters will be spewing out of warp gates all over the ecliptic and the world, and many cities will be wiped out before they can do anything about it.

And the annexed cities of the doomed city would meet the same fate as the spreading monsters.

Even though she was trying to save me, Eleris couldn't even keep her head up when she was the one who caused it.

Efforts to prevent gating caused gating.

But you can't be tied down by that sense of hopelessness.

I look at the people in this room.

After all, they're the ones who trusted me to be here. First, I had to explain everything to them.

"Okay, since we're new, let's start with an introduction: these are my allies, ancient vampire lords who are older than most countries."

Tuesday's Elise.

Thursday's Lerouen.

Friday's Galash.

All three panicked at the unheard of sound of a road vampire.

"That....... It's daytime now, right......?"

"That's right......."

"Just do it."

I didn't have time to explain what a load vampire is.

"And not here, but....... You know, Lucinil, who used to be close to me."

"Yes."

"...... Why?"

"Oh....... Come to think of it, I just realized that he was......."

Olivia looked at Lucinil, who had appeared out of nowhere.

"Lucinil is....... One of the Lord Vampires who infiltrated the Temple."

Will Lucinil be okay.

Even as I spoke, I couldn't help but feel a flutter in my heart.

\* \* \*

Everyone was stunned when they heard who Rusinil was, but they didn't give him enough time to explain himself.

There was just too much to explain.

I told the best story I could, assuming you all believe me without question.

Just like we did with Elise.

That he remembers from the day the demon was killed by the warrior.

We knew the gate was going to happen, and we knew the future to some extent.

That we've done everything up to this point to prevent that gate from happening.

Tracking down Akasha and Cantus Magna.

How I found out who Akasha was, and how it all went downhill just as I was about to spill the beans.

So much so that my men caused a gate incident to save me, which is why I'm where I am today.

Eleris already knew the story, but the three Temples, as well as Galarsh and Leruen, were wide-eyed when they heard what I had to say.

"So I'm trying to prevent a gate from happening, but I'm directly causing it to happen."

I don't know the look on my face when I said that.

Olivia and Harriet, however, were biting their lips.

Eleris was the one who caused the gate, and she was too guilty to say anything.

It's pretty obvious.

It would have been impossible to resist the impulses of Sarkozy or Antony.

Of course, that doesn't make Elise's sins go away.

"Anyway, we can't just sit back and do nothing because this is how things have gotten to this point. We have to do something."

It's ridiculous that I'm the one who caused the gate debacle and now I'm around to clean up the mess.

But why not?

My life is exchanged for the lives of tens or hundreds of millions of others. Even if I didn't ask for it, it's already happened.

So even if it's just one.

Isn't it my duty to save even one life that will die because of me?

Antirrhinus wants me to crumble in despair, but I have no intention of doing so.

I thought I was going to save everyone.

I knew I couldn't save everyone, but I tried.

And in the end, I was the one who caused the situation that got everyone killed.

When you do.

You put me in that situation.

Did you think I was going to fall down?

Did you think I was going to fall apart?

Did you think you'd never get back up?

If I could die and save everyone, I would.

However, my death now does not create anything more than nothingness.

What I can do in death is gone, so I'll do what I can do in life.

Since I cannot find meaning in death, I will find meaning in life.

I'm not a strong person, but I did a lot of thinking while I was being held.

In my despair, I hoped that my death would be the end of it all.

But I didn't die.

I survived, had to watch the gate happen, and was thrown back out into the world.

The world wants me to fall apart.

Whether it's out of spite, resentment, or bitterness.

You can't go down without a fight.

I don't want to be the guy who wakes up in the middle of the continent after the Gate debacle, stunned, thinking I did it all wrong.

If you have to be strong, be strong.

I don't know what the line is in this situation.

It would be evil to fall and not get up.

You wanted good, but you couldn't make it happen.

At least I'll avoid evil.

You've decided to stay away from evil.

Unbreakable.

You can't sit back.

I have to do what I can.

"Reinhardt....... You have to save the humans? Why?"

Olivia said.

They don't believe you, they'll only hate you, and when they find out, they'll say the devil was the cause of everything and everyone will hate me.

Olivia didn't seem to understand what I was saying when I asked her why we should save them.

"Because I, the world, made it that way."

This is a world I've created, and people have fallen victim to the absurdities I've created.

If only that were a reality.

It's where that imagination became reality.

Try to solve the absurdity you created, and get hit with an even worse absurdity.

I was thrown into that situation.

It's a world of my own making, an absurdity of my own making.

So I have to fix it.

They don't understand what I mean.

It's okay if you don't understand it.

Do what you can in a given situation.

Even when I didn't know what caused the gate, I did what I could given the circumstances.

The result was the gate crisis.

I still do what I can, given the circumstances.

Other than that, there's nothing.

"I have to calm this down somehow."

"I don't think I can do everything by myself, because what I can do by myself is very limited and probably not worth it in the grand scheme of things."

"I'm going to do what I can, and it's probably not going to mean much by myself, so I'm going to need a lot of people."

"You don't have to cooperate with me, and if you don't believe in what I'm doing, you don't have to do anything, but I'm going to be somewhat accountable to the people who trusted me and came this far. At least a place where we can be safe. I'll make that happen."

"And I'm trying to do something I can't do alone, so it's going to have to be a 'we' instead of a 'me'."

"We've got to get a place where we can be safe, we've got to create our own faction, we've got to create people who follow us, we've got to grow our power....... We're going to have to do those things....... So......."

A gate event has occurred.

Therefore, I can no longer be content to work alone or with a small group of people to solve this problem.

"I will rebuild the Darklands."

That's why I can't help but dream of rebuilding the Darklands.

I.

It's only now, after all this time, when everything is broken.

He realized that he shouldn't just be a prince of the ruins, he should be the king of a rebuilt Darklands.

\* \* \*

Rebuild the Demon Realm to calm the gate situation. If I go in alone, I'll only be able to break a few gates, and I'm pretty sure I'll die a self-destructive death.

I am stronger than most humans, but I have my limits.

It doesn't matter if I'm a Swordmaster or a Grandmaster.

Even if the Swordmasters are superhuman, can they save the world?

Through the power of those who follow me, we will save villages, tribes, and cities, and bring about a complete end to the Gate Crisis.

So I'd rather use my political power, my influence, than my strength.

"I haven't thought about who will follow me or how I'll form my faction yet, but I'll start with......."

"I know."

I was about to say something, but Olivia interrupted.

"What?"

"Someone on your side, someone who will listen. No, people."

I thought I knew what Olivia was talking about.

"If it's the Five Great Lords....... I'm pretty sure he'd try to deny it, even if I had the holy relic, since I'm the one responsible for the gate?"

"No, not you."

Olivia shook her head vigorously.

"Magickal."

a.

Suddenly, a proposition popped into my head that I had forgotten because of all that had happened.

Demonology.

"I know where the cultists are, and I know where they are."

No, really, when?

"The Satanists think you should be dead, not just faking it. I've seen it all."

Olivia went on to tell me in detail that the ruined cities of the Gelkhorgir Desert were the strongholds of the Demon Cult, and that she had already mapped out all of their locations.

Originally, I thought they were going to be my enemies, so I mobilized the Crusaders to hunt them down, but before I could report to the Crusaders, they were captured by the Knights of Shanapelle.

Magickal.

They're dangerous, but right now I need a force.

I need strength more than anything. The demigods, who worship me even though I don't want them to, and who will take my word for it, are a force to be reckoned with at this point.

This happened because of bad timing.

If the timing was off, the Demon Cultists would have already been wiped out by the Crusaders.

This juxtaposition is both terrible for me and good for me at some points.

Herriot and Riana didn't understand how Olivia could have gotten that information.

They don't know that Olivia has access to demonic powers.

It would be easy to gain the trust of the Demonists just by dealing with demonic powers, so reaching them would be the easiest thing for Olivia to do.

"Okay....... Well, I guess it's important that we get the Satanists under control first......."

It was also very important for me to have the Demon Gods in my faction.

And the Gelkorgis Desert is uninhabited; there are no warp gates there, so it's not affected by the gate crisis, and probably doesn't even know it's happening on the continent.

-Foodie!

Out of nowhere, a swarm of bats began to fly from one side of the forest. Herriot pointed at it, his face white.

"Hey, what's that......?"

"Don't be a dick."

Soon, it coalesced in front of us and took the form of an old man in a black suit, bowler hat, and cane.

Antirrhinus looks at me, removes his hat, and bows his head deeply.

"I see a great being."

Antirrhinus smiled and put his hat back on his head, as if he was not amused by the situation.

Yes.

I'm going to love the fact that I've arrived at the answer to everything and now I've made a mess of things.

"That old man is Antony of Toyo, the last of the Lord Vampires I told you about. He's insane, so don't befriend him."

"Heh heh. You're being harsh."

In the face of my tirade, Antirrhinus only smirked.

I think that's a lot of information for these three to take in, and I don't have time to explain it to them right now anyway.

"The Lord of Demand and Sarkegar have been captured, and Lord Loyaar and Effinghauser are dead."

Antirrhinus came with a message.

Dr. Effinghauser and Loyard are dead.

"Seo, the teacher said....... Why?"

"Our teacher?"

Liana and Harriet both went white at the mention of Dr. Effinghauser's death.

I don't know why.

Dr. Effinghauser tried to save me and said it was not the Order's will.

Dr. Effinghauser betrayed the Order, tried to save me, and died.

And Loyardo is dead.

I doubt the Rotary Club will survive.

What happened to Adriana.

Some survived, but too many were dead or in doubt.

"......."

The pressure and hopelessness of the situation was overwhelming.

Why Dr. Effinghauser died for me.

I want to think about Loyard and the deaths of the club members, but I don't have time to dwell on it.

I didn't know what a king was, and I never thought I wanted to be one.

I had no intention of answering Sarkegar's desire for me to be king.

However, I decided to be a king.

A king is not a place for a man who is saddened and depressed by such things, who shrinks into a corner and sinks into despair.

What happens is what happens.

Who loved me, how much I loved someone.

What were the memories I had with them, what they meant to me.

Rather than reminiscing about it, we should be embracing the future.

So you put it on the back burner, you put it on the back burner, you put it on the back burner, you put it on the back burner, you put it on the back burner, you put it on the back burner, you put it on the back burner until everything is fine.

You end up forgetting.

A being who ended up not knowing what to remember, who to remember, or what to grieve.

That would be the king.

Loyaar is dead.

Effinghauser is dead.

However.

Rusinil and Sarkegar were captured.

It's still alive.

Put aside your grief for the dead.

Though I don't know when I'll be able to grieve it.

Since I cannot reverse death, I must slow the death of my people, those who are still alive.

"Antirrhinus, can you deliver a scorpion to the empire?"

"I think that's about as good as it gets."

I must be the one who holds the future.

You can't live in the past.

"Tell them we're going to deal with the gate situation on our own terms, and that we have no intention of fighting the humans."

The Gate debacle has already happened.

"But if you kill Lucinil and Sarkegar, they are permanent enemies from that moment on."

This is no joke.

"Tell him that."

You can't bring down an empire as usual.

"I'm sure you don't realize that I could do that if I wanted to, having absorbed the powers of Satanism."

But if I were to absorb the power of the demonic religion as I am now, I could bring down humanity, not the empire.

The Empire might be too stupid to realize it. So they might kill Lucinil and Sarkegar.

If that happens, I will crush the empire and build a new one on its ruins.

There's no such thing as a human master of humanity.

"Hmph, hmph, hmph....... By all means, I will pass it on, great one......."

I narrowed my eyes at Antrianus, who smirked, as if he found my words and decision so amusing.

This is the kind of inspiration that would have pushed Elise over the edge.

"If you paraphrase it, it won't be funny."

At my words, Antirrhinus shook his head repeatedly.

"Hehe....... Why would I pursue such a frivolous pursuit?"

Yes.

I believe in Antigone's quote about not playing around unless it's extreme fun.

-Tap!

-Foodie!

Everyone is looking at Antirrhinus ominously as he flies away, transformed into a swarm of bats.

He warns the Empire that if they dare to threaten Sarkegar and Lucinil's safety, they could be in real trouble.

The Empire may hate me, but that doesn't mean they can't think about what would happen if they had me as an enemy.

Getting them back may be difficult in the short term, but it may be possible in the long term.

"So, Archdemon, do you intend to travel to the Gelkorgis Desert from now on?"

Lerouen looked at me and asked.

Galarsh and Lerouen are still trying to cooperate with me.

If they choose to leave, I have nothing to say. They've done so much for me that I have nothing to give.

"The Gelkorgis Desert is my stronghold. If I know exactly where the cultists are, I can deliver them."

"Maybe, but it's not a top priority."

There are more important things than gaining power.

Base.

A land where we can be safe.

And before that.

I look at Harriet and Liana.

"You guys, your families are....... What the hell are you going to do?"

They were trying to save me somehow. I don't know what their plan was, but it got tangled up in the gate outbreak.

But it was clear that they thought their families were in danger. Not just their lives, but the lives of people across the continent.

"Arnaka is....... It's going to be okay....... I trust my dad......."

Arnaka, capital of the Principality of Saint Thuan.

The Archduke said he must be more worried about his daughter, who had sided with the Devil. Herriot bowed his head and clenched his fists.

Herriot seemed to believe that the Duchy of St. Thuan, let alone the Archduke, would be able to handle the chaos that would ensue from the Gate.

I look at Riana this time. She looks off into the distance of the forest and speaks slowly, as if sighing.

"......I told my mom I was going to do this today."

Somehow, Riana knew that the Empire, not me, was the target of her vengeance. If she said that, it must mean her mother knew, too.

Riana chose to side with the devil to destroy the empire, and her mother was okay with it.

After the death of Duke Granz, it was clear that much had changed in the Duchess's mind.

The Duchess allowed Riana to risk her life to avenge her father.

But right now, it's not Riana who's in danger, it's the Duchess.

It's not like Herriot is afraid, but believes in the power of the Grand Duke of Saint-Antoine and the Duchy, so even though he's nervous, he knows his father will be safe.

The Duchess's life is in danger, and even if she is indeed safe until the Gate situation is stabilized, she cannot be safe unless I am certain that Riana is on my side.

Riana's hands shook as she clenched into fists.

"So my mom says....... you know. We went to....... the other day."

Hmm?

No?

"Edina Archipelago?"

"Yeah, go to the cottage over there, because if I do this....... I'll be in danger......."

Duchess Granz ducked out of the way, knowing that Riana was going to cause an accident.

But if the gate has opened in the Edina Archipelago, the Duchess's life will be in danger. So Riana agrees to help me, but knowing that her mother's life is in danger, she can't be at ease.

"That's great."

But at my words, not only did Riana narrow her eyes at me, but Harriet flinched as if she didn't know what I was talking about.

"What, that's good?"

"Great, then."

I crossed my arms.

"Because we're going to the Edina Archipelago."

Where we'll be based from now on.

Saving Airi, who would otherwise be in danger, but is too far from the continent and news comes in very late.

Edina Archipelago.

That isolated archipelago is the perfect place for us to grow our power while staying out of the eyes of the Empire.

"We're going to take over the Edina Archipelago."

That will be the starting point for the rebuilt Darklands.

You go to rescue Airi.

And we're going to save Duchess Granz.

So it can only be a good thing.

第451季节

The Edina Archipelago is essentially a remote island nation outside of the regular warp gate system that covers the entire continent.

There are small warp gates connecting the islands of the archipelago, but they only connect island to island and do not reach the continent.

Due to the nature of gate events, where the bigger the gate, the bigger the monsters, the smaller the gate event was in other areas.

But that's only relative.

-croak

It can handle the familiar shape of the monster, which looks like a small dog.

-Kiriririk

However, there are some variants that have dozens of arms and dozens of eyeballs attached to each arm.

Not only are these creatures horrifying to look at, but the dozens of arms they have to kill everyone within their reach would send soldiers fleeing in a panic, let alone ordinary people.

It looks arbitrary.

When the inevitable monsters start pouring out of the warp gate, people, both soldiers and civilians, have no choice but to flee.

The area around the warp gate was quickly turned to rubble, and fire-breathing monsters set buildings ablaze. In an instant, Razak, the main port city of the Edina Archipelago, was filled with chaos and screams.

-Pooh! Pow!

"This is....... replace......!"

The succubus queen, Airi, gritted her teeth and shot the creatures with her cage, then looked out at the monsters still lining the streets, and growing in number.

There's no reason to have a weapon, so the cage she's holding now was the dead guard's weapon.

Being a mixed race of demons, Airi had seen her fair share of demons and beasts.

However, the monsters that appeared now resembled some of the demons and beasts that existed in the world, while others were anomalies that could hardly be considered life.

The guards had already lost their nerve with the monstrous creatures, whose very existence was terrifying.

Despite losing her horns, Airi had learned to fight, and the other succubi under her command were gritting their teeth to keep her sane, somehow managing to hold off the onslaught of monsters.

The president and staff of Angel Capital, including Airi, who started out as a bar and was accused of sucking people's blood with a hook.

They were the only ones remaining sane and holding their weapons as the guards fled.

Angel Capital, like a giant temple in Airi, has become a temporary refuge for those who have nowhere else to run.

People hid behind the succubi and watched as the pink-haired loan shark boss caged, beat, and even tore the monsters apart with his bare hands.

-Airi from.......

-Was that a good fight......?

-It's a monster.......

The crowd inside the entrance to Angel Capital stood frozen, watching as the guards stood at the entrance, shooting and killing any monsters that fled in fear.

Even with her horns removed, Airi's physical abilities are not comparable to those of a normal human.

In the midst of the catastrophe that was about to consume the Edina Archipelago, they found themselves defending their customers and long-term prey.

A sudden catastrophe.

-currrrrr

Airi watched, frozen, as the burning building collapsed, crushing the fleeing people under its rubble.

"What are the soldiers doing?"

Airi muttered nervously, but even she was getting tired of looking at the monsters.

The Edina Archipelago is an outlier among outliers.

Some of the most skilled or talented people leave for the continent with big dreams.

The people left on the island aren't necessarily ravenous, but you can't expect them to grit their teeth and defend themselves against a sudden catastrophe.

How many soldiers are there on this small archipelago, how many knights are there, how many of them are enchanted, and how many wizards are there.

Anyone who could be enchanted would be considered the best of the best in the archipelago at that moment, and if they were young enough to be enchanted, they would have gone to the continent with bigger dreams.

Airi doesn't know where it all started.

All they've heard from those who have fled is that monsters are coming out of the warp gate.

Is this happening only in this razak, only in the archipelago. Or an entire continent.

No one knows unless they hear it from the devil himself.

"Hmph!"

Airi breathed raggedly as she pierced the gills of a charging two-headed bear with her spear, then stabbed the other one in the skull with the longsword sheathed at her waist, killing it instantly.

"허억....... 허억......."

There's no telling how long the monsters will keep coming.

As she watched the corpses lining the streets, and more being added to the pile, Airi drew the bars from the desperate bear-like creature.

Hates humans.

It wished for the destruction of humans.

-Grrrrrr!

However, a large lizard that nearly filled the alleyway flicked its tail once, sending people flying.

I hate humans.

In the long run, I was hoping for the extinction of the human race.

I wonder if this is allowed to happen.

Not by war, not by anything, but by an inexplicable catastrophe.

Civilians, not soldiers, who have never known a fight in their lives.

Just like that, I can die a trashy death.

Even though she was making a living squeezing people, Airi couldn't help but realize that there were humans who deserved to be loved.

Some people spent their entire family fortune on overnight gambling tables, and others were playing with their own money, not borrowing from Capital to build their fleet.

I've had someone come in and say they couldn't pay back the money they borrowed, and they did.

But.

I've also seen people who really need money, but the amount they need is so insignificant.

I saw people who were too poor to be Airy's customers.

A boy begged his mother to lend him ten pieces of silver now because she was sick, and he would pay her back later when he was an adult.

I saw a group of little kids who were going out to play because their brother was starving at home.

Many sailors starved because they couldn't afford a meal.

I didn't think of it as compassion.

The insignificance is so insignificant, so insignificant.

I once dug into my pocket and lent him a few silver coins, with a playful remark that I'd pay him back later.

It was definitely there.

I've seen that insignificant amount of money that I forgot about as soon as I gave it, really pay off a few days later.

I once received a silver dollar that doubled in size as I knocked on the door of an angel capital with a huge smile on my face, thanking them for saving my life and saying that I would pay them back as an adult.

There was a time when that little guy was so cute, I couldn't help but hug him with all my might.

Thinking it shouldn't be this way with humans.

It's a small acknowledgment.

To me, it's a small price to pay for such a big deal.

No.

You never know when the world's perception of you as a money ghost and a bunch of money-crazed bitches will come back to bite you in the ass.

I think it's a public opinion business and a political business to prepare for that.

He started an interest-free loan program for starving children and families who lost their fathers in storms.

It's a loan, and since Airi has no intention of getting the money back, it's actually a donation. Lending money to people who can't pay it back is a donation, unless you're trying to hold their leash.

To the adults of Razak, Airi was a demon.

To them, Airi was an angel.

In keeping with the name Angel Capital, which she coined with malicious intent, Airi was a devil to some and an angel to others.

It was a red line that I drew because I couldn't stand the little struggles and insignificance.

Those kids, in the streets.

-Quack! Quack!

It was really dying a slow death.

With a short, sharp scream, it was being bitten, torn, and crushed.

"Ah....... ah......."

If you leave, everyone behind you dies, too.

I couldn't leave for the sake of my employees, the people in the shelters, and my children.

So Airi could only watch the tiny struggles of the dying with squinted eyes.

Airi felt like she was on the verge of tears once in her life.

When the demon castle falls and is taken in chains to the humans.

That one time when you felt all was lost.

And now.

Airi was once again feeling what it was like to be on the verge of tears as she watched humans, human children, not demons, die.

Monsters are pouring into the streets.

Some were small, like wild dogs, but others were clearly giant lizard-like creatures, stalking across the street.

Though the broken horns always brought bitterness to themselves.

For today.

I don't think I've ever felt more sorry for a broken horn than I do today.

If I had the power.

If only I had the power.

-No!

I wish I could have run to that little girl calling out to me as she ran down the street, protecting me from the giant lizard.

The boy who said he needed money for medicine for his mother one day.

You didn't have to look away.

No.

I can't turn away.

"Boss!"

"You can't go!"

Airi lost her temper and ran down the stairs toward the boy.

After the fall of the Demon World, Airi lived to destroy things.

However, the power you want to have to destroy something.

One of the rules of society.

Capital.

In this situation.

At a time when the very fabric of society is disintegrating.

In this situation, all the rules break down.

Capital, a power based on rules, cannot protect anything.

No amount of capital can overcome the violence in front of us.

Only in body.

Only by action.

It can destroy something or protect something.

Airi leapt to her feet and roughly grabbed the boy with her left arm as he ran down the street.

"Sis! Sis...... Hm, hm, hm!"

"I'll protect you....... I'll protect you......."

Holding the boy in her arms, Airi sees a giant lizard slithering toward her.

The cage Airi holds in her right hand is shorter than the creature's gills.

If you try to poke it, it will swallow you up.

It's too late to back down.

In the midst of destroying humanity, he protects a human being, a boy who is nothing, and is eaten by an unidentified monster.

This is.

I don't think that's what Valerie wants.

Cradling the floating boy in her arms, Airi aims her spear at the charging creature.

"Bali.

To your childhood friend who isn't here.

To the boy he recognized as his lord.

In the end, it doesn't help at all.

"I'm sorry.

Just as I was about to roll down the window with that thought.

-pot!

As if time had slowed down, Airi saw a girl with forked hair appear in front of her.

As if she had a glowing blue tattoo on her body, the girl who had suddenly appeared held out both hands in front of her.

-Bam!

-knowwhat!

The lizard slammed its face into the blue barrier and screeched and took a few steps back.

What's going on here.

A mysterious wizard appeared and saved him.

"Are you okay?"

Before she could answer the girl's question, Airi saw.

A human-shaped balier leaping from the sky.

-POOF!

And then he plunges Alsbringer, the sword of the War God, into the lizard's head.

-Currrrr!

Then, the jewel around Valier's neck glows red, and the lizard is engulfed in flames and burns.

"Val......?"

Airi, looked.

\* \* \*

He's surprised to see Valerie in human form out of nowhere.

Airi couldn't help but be even more appalled.

-Kurrrrr! kurrrrr!

Suddenly, darkness descended upon the sky, and lightning began to fall.

-blink!

Dozens of times a second.

-Crack!

As if aimed at the monsters lining the streets, lightning flashed and monsters fell or exploded as they were struck by lightning.

"Is this....... What the hell......?"

Lightning was wiping out the monsters flooding the streets, as if some divine salvation had been sent to deal with this inexplicable scourge.

Turning her head, Airi could see the blonde, short-haired girl emitting blue electricity from her entire body.

-Quack!

And in the distance, I heard the sound of a fierce bombing.

"I think Elise handled the gate."

Valier drew his sword and walked toward him, accompanied by a girl with forked hair.

"How do you get to...... in Bali?"

"Let's get this place cleaned up and then we can talk."

As bewildered as Airi was, the boy she had just saved was equally dumbfounded.

A catastrophe that felt like it was going to bring the world down was being completely neutralized at the hands of a lightning bolt from nowhere.

"Harriet, you're in charge of finding the Duchess. Do you remember the location?"

"Yes."

"We're on the outskirts of town, so I don't think there are any monsters there yet, but we'd better get going. Riana and the road vampires will be in charge here."

"Okay."

Airi watched dumbfounded as the girl called Herriot was teleported away in continuous teleportation, the blue tattoos reactivating all over her body in an instant.

Valerie sees Airi hugging a boy.

Airi couldn't help but freeze under Valier's gaze.

Rebuilding the Demon Realm and taking revenge on humanity.

If you have done this to save a boy who cooperates with you, you have disqualified yourself as a servant of Valier.

You're bound to be disappointed.

As Airi stood frozen in place, unable to do anything, Vali said nothing, but ruffled the hair of the boy she was holding, not Airi.

As in, I'm glad the boy is alive.

He didn't smile, but he had no expression.

There seemed to be no complaints about the boy's survival and Airi's behavior.

"I see him over there."

Valier pointed to the girl, who was still summoning lightning with a blue lightning bolt wrapped around her body.

"Huh? Ah......."

"He'll take care of everything around here."

He summoned an Alsbringer in his right hand, as if he were going to be in a place she couldn't see.

-Chee!

As Valier watched the monsters pour in from one side of the alley, the flames consumed them in an instant.

-Breathe!

-Woof!

And in a distant alley somewhere, I could see a flash of divine light.

"We'll talk about this later. I've got to go."

"ugh, ugh......."

Airi watched as Valier took off down the street, and then slumped back into her seat, still clutching the boy in her arms.

"My sister....... We....... Did we buy......?"

As the frightened boy shivered and hugged his neck, Airi gently patted him on the back, frozen herself.

"Yeah....... I guess so......."

I also don't understand the sudden appearance of Valerie.

He didn't come alone, he brought a whole bunch of people with him who might be able to help.

Episode 452.

Razak, the main port city and capital of the Edina Archipelago, had only one warp gate, and it was small.

It wasn't long after the event that Reinhardt started bringing people in to help with the broader response.

Eleris destroyed the warp gate before it could reach Razak, Riana summoned lightning bolts across the land to wipe out the monsters, and Reinhardt and Olivia, as well as Leruen and Galarsh, worked to rid Razak of its monsters.

So things calmed down pretty quickly.

Still, the Gate debacle left an indelible mark on Razak.

Countless buildings were burning, and bodies lined the streets.

The monsters were mostly gone, but the streets were filled with the cries of people.

The gate situation is basically designed to create fear and confusion in people.

In the midst of the fear and panic, it would be difficult to deal with the creature, and even if they could, the damage would be immense.

It is unlikely that every location with a small warp gate will have an archmage or combat troops stationed there.

Even though we were on top of it the first day, there was a lot of damage in Razak, and I don't think it would be any different elsewhere.

Unless it was a city with powerful wizards and knights, it was likely to be destroyed rather than damaged on this scale, and a city with that level of military presence would inevitably have medium to large warp gates, which would increase the number and size of the monsters that would emerge.

Riana and Olivia couldn't help but freeze as they watched Razak turn into a living hell in a single day.

No matter how much they say they're doing it to save Reinhardt, this is the work of the Devil's minions.

Activating Akasha with her own hands, Eleris was speechless as she realized the depth of her crime.

The Razak situation has been sorted out to some extent.

So we gathered at the front door of Angel Capital.

Valier the Demon, Elise, Lerouen, Galash, Olivia, Airi, and of course, Herriot and Liana.

Everyone was staring at Valerie.

After firing up Akasha, Eleris couldn't keep her head up.

But there was no despair on the face of Valier, who had tried to stop this from happening and had started it all.

I've tried to stop all of this, and everyone is feeling miserable and bitter, even though they didn't do anything to cause it.

The devil didn't seem to think about any of that.

"Razak's been cleared, so there's no time to lose, and I think we can handle the monsters coming out of the miniature gates on our own....... Airi, how many islands in the archipelago have miniature warp gates?"

"......It's St. Louis, Fort Lambs, and Greenwinds."

"Okay, let's split up into groups of three. Elise, take Riana, get the coordinates for St. Louis and head there. You and Olivia will go to Fort Ramsey, and the Greenwyns will have Harriet back soon, so I think you can take her and clean up after her."

They were to divide their forces between three different ports, the only large cities in the tiny Edina Archipelago.

It was his judgment that two of them in this room would be enough to handle the small warp gate.

"We need to move fast, because if the monsters overrun the city and get away with it, we might be in for a tedious scavenger hunt."

As if he didn't have enough time to express his feelings about the devastation that had occurred, Valier was brief with instructions on what to do next.

It seemed like the kind of attitude a party leader should have, but it also seemed too cold.

But directives.

At the Demon's command, the road vampires begin casting.

Still fearful of the situation, those hiding in Angel Capital stare at the city's saviors beyond the front door.

Bali didn't give them the slightest glance.

As if it was their job to save them, but now that they've been saved, there's nothing more to do.

"Airy."

"Uh, ah....... Yeah."

Airi still doesn't know what's going on. Valerie was only saying what she had to say.

"Let's go to the Royal Palace of Edina."

"The Royal Palace......? The Royal Palace is....... Why?"

"I'm going to be king here from today."

As if to say, I'm going to make it happen because I said so.

The volley was too casual.

For everything.

\* \* \*

Late at night.

-currrr

The burning zodiacal gradient had mages scrambling to put out the flames.

The ecliptic, home to humanity's greatest powers.

However, the city of Ecliptic Gradient is home to the largest concentration of super-sized warp gates on the entire continent, as well as the largest concentration of small and medium-sized warp gates.

The most dangerous city, the Gate of the Zodiac, was subdued within a day, thanks to humanity's greatest powers, who jumped into action as soon as it happened.

But the damage was done.

In addition to the destruction and burning of the city's major infrastructure, as much as a third of the city was destroyed and more than a quarter of its citizens were killed.

Like the port cities of the Edina Archipelago, the Zodiacal Gradient was filled with the screams and wails of countless people.

And it's better that way.

Everywhere in the Empire, where warp gates were installed, there were worse scourges raging.

-Woof!

The last of the Zodiac's monsters has fallen, as the cathedral-sized beast crumbles to the ground with a final crash.

-Crack!

In a flash, Ellen Artorius, who had climbed the creature from its legs to its shoulders, plunged her Voidblade into its skull and crushed its skull with a blast of magic, landed on its back and waist as it crumbled to the ground.

Now everyone knows that Ellen not only has a bizarrely deformed lament, but also a sun god's cloak, the Rapelt.

"Is this the last one?"

At Ellen's words, the men who had hunted the last monster nodded in agreement.

What's done is done.

Just focusing on coping is urgent.

Just as the current Demon King doesn't give any indication of his feelings about everything, Ellen is no different, seeing herself as the cause of this mess.

Similarly, the knights of Shanapelle, who had hunted down the last giant monster, arrived at Ellen's location.

"Ellen....... Why on earth would....... helped the devil escape?"

At Savior Tana's words, Ellen stares at her.

Up until this point, I'd been too busy reacting to the situation to talk about it, but now I had to.

Ellen helped the demon escape.

There were no casualties, but Ellen's actions may have led to another war in the future.

But Ellen didn't make any excuses or rationalizations for her actions.

I didn't say that this happened because you didn't believe in the devil.

Ellen herself didn't believe in the devil.

"Are you going to arrest me?"

"......."

"I don't think so."

So Ellen gives the empire a dose of reality, not reason.

This is no ordinary Swordmaster, but one with two holy relics.

In fact, Ellen had killed the most monsters today, second only to Saviolin Tana. Not the smaller ones that come out of the Edina Archipelago, but the giant ones, the ones that are so powerful that a single one can reduce a village to ashes in an hour.

The last thing we need is to treat Ellen like a criminal in a situation where we all feel sorry for her.

Maybe after all is said and done, but for now, the Empire should be grateful that Ellen is cooperating.

"Please tell me where I should go. There must be a lot of dangerous cities."

Ellen feels responsible for the situation.

"Also, if you have any stimulants, please bring them with you."

As such, Ellen had no intention of taking a break.

There is no such thing as time to be sad and depressed.

There's no time to be remorseful about your actions.

Just as Reinhardt doesn't beat himself up about how nothing would have happened if he hadn't done anything.

Ellen didn't take the path of regret, telling herself that if she had trusted Reinhardt more, none of this would have happened.

You can't save yourself, and you can't save others, with a tragic appreciation of the devastation that has occurred.

You'll have to make that judgment at that time.

You have to move in time for that.

We must save one more city, one more person.

Because they think it's the only thing they can do.

It's not about regret or self-pity, it's about doing the best you can under the circumstances.

Demons and heroes.

Both, in a sense, are stronger than before.

In ways neither of them ever wanted.

\* \* \*

The palace of the kingdom of Edina was located on the outskirts of the port city of Rajak, on a cliffside of a high hill.

It was never as large as the Imperial Palace, nor was it as elegant as the White Palace of Arnaria, located in Arnaka, the capital of the Duchy of Saint Thuan.

More of a citadel than a palace, the size of the castle was a measure of the quality of the Edina Kingdom.

Still, it was the royal castle of a nation. It was not the humble scale of a lord's castle or manor house on a provincial estate.

The castle was on the outskirts of the city and was not directly affected by the gate incident.

It wasn't hard to get directions to the castle.

I think he had some idea of the upheaval in the city, and that it was me and my crew who were organizing it, when he saw me and Airi walking up to the castle.

And Airi had been doing business in the city for quite some time. And this angel capital business had been going on with the support of the royal family.

Airi's friends.

The man who, in a matter of hours, put an end to a cataclysmic, kingdom-destroying event in the capital.

It was strange that the door wouldn't open.

In the real world, the king was still blue in the face, and his vassals had no idea what was going on, so it was no wonder they panicked.

"You are....... Who are you?"

Guards.

Bodyguard knights at the king's side.

I look at their facets.

"While the people of the capital are dying like dogs, this bastard of a king is here, shivering and sleeping......."

The sudden outburst stiffened the king and his guards.

"I'm not going to bother explaining anything."

Using Sarkegar's Ring, I summoned Alsbringer and slung it over my shoulder. I could feel everyone's breath catch in their throats at the sudden appearance of a demon and a soul-bound sword.

"From this day forward, this kingdom and all the islands of the Edina Archipelago belong to me, Valie the Demon."

Airi's face turned white at my blunt remark.

There's no time for persuasion and debate.

I look around.

"No sneaky bastard."

Still, it was clear that we weren't quite sure what was going on.

\* \* \*

Of course, no one is going to give up their country just because you ask them to.

The first to react was the knight standing next to the king.

"Bastard, no matter how suspicious the circumstances, you come out of nowhere and defy His Highness!"

He descended the steps of the throne and rested his hand on the hilt of his sword.

"Don't pull it."

"What......?"

I said so towards the article.

"If you pull it, you die."

"You insolent......!"

-Thwack!

-Bam!

The knight who drew his sword was struck by Alsbringer before he could even leave his scabbard, and his sword shattered as if it had exploded.

Didn't kill it.

But before I could get a good grip on the sword, the lost knight was just looking at me with a dumbfounded expression on his face.

"If you try to do more, you'll end up with a warning."

If we need to see blood, we will, but we don't need to see it on purpose.

He was probably the most skilled knight in the room, and as he froze, neither the other knights nor the guards approached me easily.

I passed the driver who cut in front of me.

No knights and guards stood in my way.

-jerky

Climbing the steps to the throne room, I stood before the king.

"Get out of the way."

"What......?"

At that simple statement, the king froze and stared at me blankly.

"Get out of the way."

No one ever laid a hand on me. I think it was because they realized that if they tried to touch me, I would run for my life.

The king looked around, but it seemed that no one would dare risk their lives to defend their lord in the presence of a demon.

It's not about loyalty.

Because I'm not just a thug, I'm a demon.

He's a demon that makes entire continents go crazy.

This is a country that couldn't even handle a small gate situation and nearly destroyed its capital.

The Devil was too big a name for the soldiers and knights of the Edina Archipelago to handle.

He's not just a rogue or a ruffian, he's a demon.

No one knows what will happen if I start to get my hands dirty, so just by showing my true colors, I stir up people's sinister imaginations.

The reputation of fear that has been cast upon you is yours to exploit if you choose to do so.

That's why I'm able to do this, barefoot and with only an iriman.

Son of Valier the Ancestor, who was an absolute.

No one can touch me because I'm playing out terrifying fantasies in my head about what he could do.

I watched as the king shakily rose from his seat.

-Hair

He sits on the throne of an absent king.

I didn't love the gray rock hewn throne, but I didn't love it either.

Sitting in the master's chair was easy.

I can't believe it's so easy to steal a country.

But it's a start.

You may be the boss, but not everyone recognizes you as such.

Sitting on a throne doesn't make you a king.

However, I made the master of the throne stand up on his own.

That's important.

"Half the world."

"Lord of all the lands of the Darklands."

"Leader of all the demons in the world."

"Demon Lord."

"In the name of Valerie."

"To the previous kings and royalty of the Kingdom of Edina, who have surrendered their thrones to me, I promise you a long life in peace."

Well, that was my first royal name.

Episode 453.

You have seized the throne of the Edina Archipelago.

Too easy.

A rogue who comes out of nowhere and makes the king stand up from his seat doesn't make him the master.

But I am the devil.

Everyone was afraid of me, not just because I was a strong rogue, but because I carried the heavy name of Demon King.

Those who didn't want to know that I was the Devil now know that I am.

So, it doesn't matter anymore that the whole world knows I'm a demon, and I'm going to take full advantage of the fear that comes with my name.

Fear is a very powerful tool of domination.

"As you have seen today, the warp gates of the entire continent have been tampered with to summon otherworldly monsters, which means that the catastrophe that is occurring is a world-scale disaster, encompassing the entire continent, not just this archipelago."

"Therefore, the anomaly that occurred in Rajak also occurred on the other islands of the archipelago, St. Louis, Port Lambeth, and Greenwindle."

"Currently, my men are working to quell the phenomenon at that location."

"The Edina Archipelago will suffer some damage, but due to its distance from the continent, it will end up destroying warp gates across the archipelago."

"The reason I tell you that I am the savior of the Edina Archipelago, which would have perished if left alone, is to let you know that my rule will be quite generous and gentle."

"Submit. You will have stability and peace."

"In the short term, I will focus on stabilizing the chaotic Edina Archipelago, and in the long term, I will venture into the monster-infested continent."

"I'll give you a day."

"We won't kill you if you refuse."

"Let those who will not submit to me leave."

"I will allow you to live as ordinary people in the archipelago. You will be able to escape my rule and go to the continent, but when you cross the long sea route and reach the continent, you will find that there is no land for you to set foot on but these islands."

With the entire continent in a state of chaos, going to the continent was a sign of death.

But they might decide that I'm telling a flat-out lie. They might think that the devil is just saying this to scare them.

It's your choice to believe me or not believe me, to obey me or not obey me.

I wasn't going to force it.

I didn't know if they would accept me, but I had a lot of work to do.

"There's been confusion, and it's scary, but for now, the upheaval in Razak is over. There's no need to be afraid, so let's get to work."

Even if the chaos has stabilized, there are still bodies in the streets. We need to focus on getting an accurate casualty count and stabilizing Razak, not just burned homes.

"All available troops are to collect bodies and determine the exact extent of the damage as of this hour, and report back to me immediately with the status of food and relief supplies stockpiled in the castle."

I could tell they were taken aback by the first mission instruction that wasn't overly demonic.

What is demonic.

Is it demonic to demand a blood sacrifice as soon as you take the throne?

Whatever demon they're expecting, I'm going to be a lot different than the one they're thinking of.

They were still dumbfounded, not knowing what I had asked them to do.

"Get your asses in gear, or get the fuck out of here, or listen to me, or get your asses in gear, you motherfuckers, you think you've got time?"

In the end, it was the same everywhere, I had to yell to be understood.

The soldiers left the castle on my orders, and I began repairing the damage in Razak.

I don't know if they'll be good at what I ask them to do, but it's day one after all.

The vassals were sent away to do their work.

\* \* \*

Late at night.

One by one, they returned to Razak.

Just as I had instructed, they all arrived at the Edina Palace.

Riana even brought Duchess Granz, who had been fleeing from Angel Capital.

I'm sure we've all seen the horrors, but it seemed to make even less sense now.

I had just arrived in Razak when I left to go to another island, and now I was sitting on the throne of Alreal, the royal palace of the country.

"......What happened?"

"You said you were going to take the Edina Archipelago."

That's all I could say to Olivia.

We have a lot to talk about, and we need to figure out what to do next.

Neither Liana nor Harriet seemed to be in their right minds, as if they'd seen something horrible. Not to mention Eleris.

Lerouen and Galarsh weren't quite as grave, but their expressions were very serious.

"One day, one king....... Was it ever so easy."

Lerouen was frozen in place.

"That was easier than I thought, given the circumstances. Anyway, how did everyone handle the situation?"

"The damage was heavy, but we managed to destroy the gate and slay the monster."

They succeeded in controlling the chaos in the four main ports of the Edina Archipelago.

"The local administrations will take care of the damage, but now that this has happened, there could be riots or something......."

"There are a lot of people who have nowhere to go....... There are so many....... How do those people......."

Herriot said with a gloomy look on his face.

"We need to start with a damage assessment in each port: how many people have lost their homes, how many orphans have been left behind, and how much relief we can give them."

It's a headache from the start.

"I'm not going to be able to do any intercontinental trade with the way things are, and I didn't come all this way to make sure the Empire didn't know where I'd settled. The Edina Archipelago has to be self-sufficient somehow from now on."

I became king to deal with the Gate situation, but the country is in crisis from the start. The royal family of Edina will be grateful to have the Devil take this headache off their hands.

We talked a lot.

I had to explain to Airi, who had no idea what was going on.

And what to do next.

What to start with.

How to replace the people whose lives were destroyed and how to take responsibility as a king.

All new to us, all things we never imagined we'd be doing until this morning.

We had to do it.

\* \* \*

It was probably the longest day I've ever had in my life, and I wasn't even done with it yet.

The royal palace was captured, but the castle was home to the royalty that had ruled the Edina Archipelago until now.

It was extortion without cause, but I am the devil.

Just as people have interpreted my behavior as if I were a demon and therefore had evil intentions, I have no intention of justifying my dominance with rhetoric.

I'm going to let them think they're doing this because they're the devil.

You don't throw the royals out overnight. They need to absorb what they know about the archipelago and the intellectual basis of their rule.

I was on the spire of a royal palace, looking out over the nighttime landscape of Rajasthan down the cliffs.

The port city was quiet after the gate was closed. In the distance, I could see soldiers wandering around with torches, collecting bodies at my command.

Smoke still billowed in places, and the cries of children who had lost their parents seemed to be audible.

All of this, my fault.

From the spire, I could see the horizon of the ocean beyond the harbor.

On the continent beyond the ocean, people were still dying.

This was my destiny.

Everyone in the Temple who is not here will probably be called into battle as the general mobilization order is issued.

Someone is going to die, and maybe even some of your classmates because the gate happened earlier than expected.

Even in this situation, which was ultimately caused by me, I'm going to do something, and I'm going to start something on this remote archipelago at the southernmost tip of the continent.

Could this be the path to saving someone's life?

Or are we just setting the stage for another war?

-Ahhhh!

Cries that shouldn't be heard seemed to be heard among the city lights.

-Stephen

I could hear waves in the ocean that shouldn't be there.

"Hey, what are you doing?"

I turned around at the sound behind me, and there was Liana de Granz.

If I became king, would we still be friends?

It was funny that I thought of myself as a king when I hadn't even been on the throne for a day.

Riana stands beside me, arms crossed, looking out over the landscape of Razak.

Liana De Granz.

While magic is important, Riana's Blitz ability was invaluable in taking down the Gate.

It also helped me escape.

"When did you know?"

Riana knew I wasn't responsible for Duke Granz's murder.

That's what saved me.

"Not long ago, my mom told me."

"...... is it?"

"I thought my dad said a lot of weird things, but a revolution, I had no idea he was going to do something like that."

Riana smirked down at Razak. Technically, Riana's discovery of the truth has nothing to do with her saving me.

However, Riana was going to save me, and she did.

It means there was an intention there other than to save me.

"You want to get rid of the empire?"

"......."

Riana was silent at my words.

"I thought you might be able to do that."

You may have been trying to save your friend, but you were also trying to save the devil.

Riana knew that Duke Granz's death was the work of the Empire, and as such, she harbored a vendetta against them.

The fact that Riana didn't immediately attack Bertus, Charlotte, or Tana reminded me of how vengeful she is.

It's a vengeance that can't be satisfied by killing a few royalty.

A vengeance that can't be satisfied, unless it's at the cost of an empire.

How much dark vengeance lay beneath Riana's seemingly carefree expression, I could not fathom.

I wonder if it's similar to the despair I'm feeling, or if it's deeper.

Just as Harriet gave up being a grand duchess and stood by my side.

Liana gave up being a duchess and stood by my side.

Of course, with the world spinning, how much more meaningful would that be?

"Apparently, you didn't really care about that."

"Right."

I said I did all this to protect humans, and I'm still doing it.

To share his vengeance, the demon seemed plausible, but in hindsight, probably not.

I don't want war, and I don't want empires to collapse.

However, Riana stretched and put her arm around my shoulders.

"But it's not like you wanted to do this, right?"

"......Yes."

My existence was already doomed, and by the time I realized it, it was too late.

In the original, the Gate was caused by Valerie, but this time it's at the hands of Eleris.

I didn't want something to happen, so it happened.

I felt like the protagonist of an old oracle.

"I mean, everything you don't want to happen somehow seems to happen?"

"...... Is that a bad word?"

"Because you don't want the empire to fall, somehow it's falling to pieces because of you."

Riana giggles.

It was one of those things where I wasn't even angry because it was overly malicious.

"In other words, if you have to go to war with the Empire, even if you don't want to, I'll give you a hand."

I wanted peace and stability for humanity, but my desire for it led to the Gate.

I still wish for peace, stability, and the maintenance of the empire, but I may be the cause of its downfall.

Because the world seems to be broken, somehow, that way.

Riana seemed to think that as long as she was by my side, she would have her chance for revenge at any moment. With her arms still around my neck, Riana gazes out over Razak.

"Hey, so I....... the Four Heavenly Kings?"

I felt my breath catch in my throat at Riana's words.

The Four Heavenly Kings?

Why is he thinking about this?

"You're ordering me four thousand kings, right?"

Riana looks at me with a twinkle in her eye.

Do it?

I hope you don't think this is some kind of neighborhood captain's game.

"Uh....... What....... If you sleep alone, how can you be King of the Four Thousand?"

"Get the other three. Vampires are like elders or something....... Harriet and Olivia and her sister....... The one with the pink hair? Doesn't that make four?"

I'm dizzy, really?

One minute you're talking about revenge, the next you're talking about this.

"Hey, that's plausible. Magic, paladins, psychics, and I don't know what that pink hair is, but that's four."

Airi, Riana, Harriet, and Olivia.

Riana had apparently drawn up a blueprint for the Four Heavenly Kings in her head even though I hadn't said anything.

I didn't say anything?

"Hey Demon, make my nickname feel a little better. Huh?"

-cookcook

Riana wraps her arms around my neck and pokes me in the side.

"You're an asshole."

At my words, Riana giggled and loosened her arms around my neck.

If you think about it, it's actually pretty easy.

It's lightning, so I'm just going to go ahead and thunder in.......

Why the hell am I even thinking about this?

"Anyway, I'm sure you've been through a lot. I saw the way you looked at me when you ran away earlier."

I hadn't cleared up Riana's misunderstanding, so when I ran into her on the way out, I thought it was all over.

The reality was quite the opposite.

"Good job, how did you resist the urge to make excuses?"

"Excusing it just makes the problem bigger."

"So."

Riana clicked her tongue.

"How have you held out so long?"

Build relationships with people without revealing your identity.

I put up with it under guilt and pressure.

Riana patted me on the head, as if to say that it was amazing that I had held out this long.

"Do you want to keep talking?"

Somehow, talking to this guy takes me back to my Temple days, which I can never go back to.

It was a good feeling, too.

It was also a horribly wistful, wistful feeling.

"Anyway, I'm going. I'm going to rest. I'm tired."

As if it hadn't been a long enough day, Riana stretches and turns to leave.

"Cliffman."

After that, I couldn't help but ask what I should have asked but never did.

"......."

"Are you okay?"

"What do you mean you're okay?"

Riana's voice was calm as she answered.

"Just. Anything."

"I didn't say anything to him."

I seem to recall that we vowed to take revenge on the demon together.

When Riana realized the truth, she didn't tell Klippmann.

I wonder if he realized that the empire was too great an enemy to share.

Riana worked with Herriot, but she didn't tell Klippmann anything.

For that reason, Kliffman will remember Riana as a traitor to the Empire and humanity.

Like I'm going to pile on the misunderstandings.

Riana will also accumulate misconceptions.

I wondered if that was okay.

Because when those misconceptions pile up and explode, it's a horrible feeling that makes you want to die.

"It should be fine."

Riana said and went downstairs.

She didn't tell Klippmann about it, because she knew she was up against a much bigger foe.

Riana, Harriet, and Olivia will be remembered as traitors to the Empire and humanity.

Because of that, everyone has to take on something, and I have to be able to take on what they have to take on.

I am their king, because they chose me.

I must be able to protect those who have chosen me.

Episode 454.

I realized that I needed to talk to people once in a while, just like Riana did when she came to me before the end of a long day.

The people in the castle who saw me would either run away with their eyes wide open or turn white and tremble.

Other than the horns, it doesn't look particularly scary.

Perhaps he was afraid of me, afraid to imagine something more than what he could see in me.

For now, my group would be staying in a guest room in the palace.

Once you've decided what to do with the remaining royalty in the palace, they'll all have their own rooms and living quarters.

I've decided to become a king, but I don't really know what it means to be a king, so I need the help of the people around me, as well as the entire royal family.

Unprepared, he stole the country from the king.

It's ridiculous.

After descending the spire and entering the guest quarters, I found Herriot staring out from the castle's terrace.

I could sense the popularity, and she looked at me and gulped.

"Ah......! Ugh, ah....... Reinhard......."

I'm sure you're not familiar with me in my demon form.

"Is this....... your real self?"

"What....... so to speak."

I don't know if that means it's real.

Herriot looked like he was about to rip my face off.

"Something....... You say you, so I guess it's you....... It's different, but....... but maybe not that different......."

Herriot stares at me, puzzled.

"I don't know, we'll see."

See.

The words had a strange resonance.

You're going to stay with me, that's what it means.

Me and Harriet stood side by side on the terrace.

My words to Herriot weren't very long.

I want you to believe one thing: that I tried to save everyone, no matter what.

How could I believe that, when what I'd done and who I was up to that point must have been so much more than I could handle.

And this situation, at the end of the day, was caused by me.

I don't know how this will play out in the long run, but Herriot has chosen to become an enemy of humanity.

"You seem to be thinking hard."

Herriot looks out the window and says nothing.

If it's my business, it's fine. The problems I have, the things that happen to me, are my problem to deal with.

But it's a different matter when the people who chose me have to share the pressure I put on them because of me.

"Right now, I don't think it's a good time to think too much about it."

Herriot said and took my hand.

"I don't know what other people think, I only know what I think."

Harriet looks up at me.

"I'm fine, so don't worry about me."

She smirked at me, as if to say, "I can't take all the burdens off your shoulders, but I can take that one away.

I'm sure he's worried about what happened to the duchy, but Herriot comforts me in this situation.

In retrospect, Herriot was genuinely concerned when things got serious.

It was the same with my duel at the beginning of my freshman year, when we were at odds.

Herriot, who had watched the duel expecting me to be beaten, was concerned for me when I was really beaten.

They were always on my side when it mattered, and sometimes I helped them.

For some time now, I've been relying on Herriot for help all the time.

"I'm not going to be able to say it's all going to be okay, I think."

Harriet holds my hand tightly and stares out the window. The situation is overwhelmingly dire, and people are dying even as we take this momentary respite.

It can't all work out. It's already too late for a lot of things.

"But there's got to be something we can do, because there's got to be something that only I can do."

Herriot sees me.

"You, being you, there must be something you can do."

So instead of beating ourselves up and feeling sorry for ourselves, let's find something we can do.

Herriot said.

That's exactly what I was thinking.

However, there was something comforting about knowing that someone else was thinking exactly what I was thinking.

"Thanks."

Herriot is a wizard of the highest caliber, and he will find something he can do.

I was going to have to figure out what I could do as a demon.

\* \* \*

After I finished talking to Harriet, I went to see Olivia.

"Ah, Reinhard."

Olivia looked at me and pulled me into a hug.

"I'm sorry we didn't have time to talk about this. I'm so glad you're okay. I'm so glad."

"Thank you, sister."

I hugged Olivia, too.

I knew Olivia would be on my side even if she knew I was a demon. But actually seeing her stand up for me was another matter.

Olivia did what she could.

Without Olivia, I might have been processed quickly. Then the gate incident might not have happened.

In the end, what Olivia did added a few days to my list, and those few days could have been the reason for the gate.

But I can't blame Olivia. My death wouldn't necessarily have prevented the Gate from happening.

Olivia tried to save my life, and she was crucial.

I lived through the Gate debacle, so there's no reason to blame Olivia for it.

I have to think that because I'm alive, because I survived, if I'm going to do something, it's going to be because of Olivia.

I have to think of it this way, that the risk I took to save Olivia led to a situation where I was able to survive when everything else was ruined.

Olivia and I sat down in our chairs.

"Honestly, I'm really, really glad you're okay, but I'm against all of this."

"......."

"I know it's shocking that you were a demon, but....... Now that I know, I don't understand."

It was bound to happen.

"There's no reason you should be protecting humans, and even though it ended up blowing up in your face, you tried to stop it, and it's great that you came all the way to the far south and took a country overnight....... Let's say we can deal with the gate thing or whatever, then what?"

I couldn't help but realize what Olivia was trying to say.

The aftermath, when all is said and done.

"In the end, it doesn't change the fact that we're the ones who caused the Gate, and no matter what you do to save the humans, they're going to hate us, and the Empire is going to propagandize that the Devil is the cause of everything in order to control the chaotic public opinion, and they're not actually wrong."

It's not exactly black propaganda for the Empire to say that we're the ones who caused the gate, because she's the one who started Akasha.

"The Empire won't admit that this wouldn't have happened if they'd believed you for a second, and there's no reason why they should. They'll inevitably direct all the blame at us."

"I suppose so."

"As a result, the Empire and the humans will try to kill you to make you responsible for all of this. No one will ever know how many people we tried to save, or that you really didn't want to do this. No one will ever understand, no one will ever admit it, because you're a demon. They'll try to bury the truth with that one word, because you're the devil."

Olivia sighs.

"Let's do nothing. This southern island nation won't be affected by the gate situation, so let's just stay here and let the continent and the humans do their thing. Let's keep to ourselves. We don't really need to be kings or anything, it'll just be a hassle, so let's just take our people and live somewhere quiet. I don't see why you should risk your life for something that will never be recognized by anyone."

Olivia, a human, tells me to stay away from humans.

Everything I do is ultimately unappreciated by any human being because I caused the gate crisis.

When the Gate debacle is over, the Empire will turn its sights on me.

The hatred of demons will stabilize the situation and bring unity and cohesion to humanity.

It's all so obvious and obvious that you don't have to think long to realize it's going to happen.

These are things Olivia knows without having to say them.

That's why Olivia is telling us to keep quiet.

"If I was doing it for recognition or hoping someone would notice, I wouldn't have started."

I had a choice.

To do something or not to do something.

It was Sarkegar's idea to enter the temple, but even inside the temple, they could have just kept quiet.

I didn't do that. I was going to do something, I was going to accomplish something.

But it was those behaviors that eventually led to the Gate debacle.

So now I'm supposed to turn my back on everything because I was right to do nothing.

You can't.

Now that I've decided to do something, if the result of my action is a gate, I have to do something else about it.

It's not because I want anyone to notice.

No, and it's not like everyone doesn't get it.

"And I don't know anyone who needs to know the truth, so that's that."

At least there are those who know that was not my intention.

It's bound to get a lot of misunderstanding and hate, but the people who need to know know.

The Empire may lay all the blame at my feet, but at least they can't deny that my intentions were pure. Otherwise, I wouldn't have given you the only solution to this situation so close to the Gate crisis.

Still, the Empire will try to scapegoat me, to make me the target of all their hatred.

They'll know that doesn't negate my intent.

That's it.

"Besides, I wouldn't be this close to my sister if the goal was to do nothing in the first place."

"......."

"It wasn't all bad, there was good, obviously."

Just because there's a huge negative outcome doesn't mean that everything I've done up to this point has led to this situation.

Harriet, Riana, and Olivia decided to trust me and followed me.

This wasn't necessarily a bad thing.

If I didn't do it because I didn't have to, then I had no reason to save Olivia in the first place.

I took a risk and saved Olivia, and I survived.

"So the things I'm about to do, the things I don't have to do, aren't necessarily going to come back to bite me in the ass. They're going to be good things, and they're going to be good things for me later, like my sister saving me. That kind of good thing."

"......."

Olivia stared at me, unable to respond to my words.

"I didn't think you'd listen to me because you've always been selfish, you've always saved me, you've always done this and that, and nothing I could say would make a difference."

Olivia smiled at me.

"But from now on, whatever you do, whatever we do, there are no secrets?"

"Of course."

As if that were enough, Olivia beamed.

If the Gate debacle is finalized, a conflict with the Empire may be next on the agenda.

There may come a time when it will be hopelessly damaging to humanity, and I will die a more miserable death.

Not Olivia, not Riana, not Harriet.

Everyone who helped me could die a miserable death.

I will never let that future happen.

I've tried to do something and failed, so I'm not going to sit around imagining that my next attempt to do something will also end in failure.

If I do nothing, the world will hate me, even if I do something.

If so, at least you're trying to do something.

Episode 455.

The next person I went to was Airi.

"Bali......."

Airi was sitting by the window of the state room, looking out.

As they all do.

Everyone was looking outside in their own way, as if they couldn't bear not to see how today's catastrophe was affecting the city.

When I arrived, Airi was carrying a child in her arms and staring blankly at a lizard monster that was running at her.

If Herriot had been any later, Airi could have been dead.

We don't know what happened to Airi to make her hate humans so much.

However, I wonder if Airi eventually realized that something is worth protecting, regardless of race.

I explained it to Airi as I had to everyone else.

What I was trying to do.

And what we're going to do next.

"I can't believe you tried to stop this......."

"It didn't work, but oh well. I did."

"Funny. I'm surprised you weren't actually interested in rebuilding the Demon Realm, but you ended up being forced to do it."

Airi stares out the window in silence.

"If we're starting over here, the Darklands we're going to rebuild are the ones that contain humans, right?"

"Probably not."

You can control demons with your abilities, but you cannot control humans with your abilities.

You can take over a castle, you can control a town.

But one nation. All lands beyond the horizon of my sight are my country, and if there are humans under my rule that I cannot see, and if they reject me.

What is a king supposed to do, how is he supposed to rule over people, by what logic?

I don't know.

"Something....... romantic."

Airi stared out the window, wondering if she was imagining a Darklands that included humans, and this time she looked at me.

"You know, Valerie."

"What?"

"It's romanticized because it's not easy."

"......."

A country of all demons, plus humans.

As romantic as that sounds, it's probably not possible.

That's why it's called romantic, because it's as difficult to realize as it is beautiful.

"But I'm a dreamer, right?"

Airi smiles at me.

"Bali, if that's your dream."

"......."

"Since I no longer have the ability to give you that dream, I'll try to make it happen in real life."

Succubus, a demon associated with dreams.

It's a demon that drains energy by making someone dream, but now it's impossible to make someone dream.

So, try to make that dream come true.

The words struck a chord, a deep chord.

Airi stares out the window.

Torch-bearing soldiers could be seen moving down a distant cliff.

"Still....... I wish I had that power today."

"...... is it?"

The power to dream.

Why is that a bad thing in this situation?

"Many children will have lost their parents and siblings. They won't be able to sleep, and if they do, they won't be able to get out of those nightmares......."

"Ah."

"Even if I couldn't save someone's reality, I could have given them a comfortable dream for the moment they fell asleep. Even if there was hell after they woke up, I could have given them happiness for the moment they fell asleep....... I could have given them a moment of happiness......."

So that you can have a restful dream, not absorb energy.

To help you escape the nightmare of reality and find some respite, if only in your dreams.

If the nightmare resurfaces after you wake up, you'll have a moment of peace.

It was as if he wanted to use his power for the sake of suffering souls, not for the sake of someone else's energies.

The succubus's power to gift dreams is a diabolical one.

It's a power that can't save anyone's reality, but it will be damn sweet.

But it's the kind of power that can't save someone, even if you truly want to use it to save them.

A human receiving a dream from a succubus, and a succubus giving a dream to a human.

It becomes a truly sad power when a succubus uses it to want someone's happiness, rather than to want theirs.

Because neither demons nor humans can give or receive true salvation.

But Airi was missing her powers, knowing that even the slightest bit of anesthesia would be needed for those who had been through hell.

If.

to be.

A feature that has never been used before.

Use 'Add settings'.

The succubus' horns, they grow back.

[This feature is disabled].

Again, no.

[There would have to be a "common sense revision" to add that setting].

[Adding settings at that level cannot be done].

I thought I knew what it meant.

It's common knowledge that a demon's severed horns don't grow back.

But if you add a setting that allows severed horns to grow back, you're going to have to revise the common sense of every succubus and airy who has ever believed that horns don't grow back.

It's not just adding a setting, it's rewriting the world.

So it can't be done.

But importantly, he didn't just say it couldn't be done, he added a caveat.

If I try to do it, can I do it?

If so, does that mean I can use it in a way that doesn't cause common sense modifications?

This asshole will never let me use this system feature when it matters most.

Just like I couldn't turn things around with a retirement.

I'm not sure I'd want to use it in a situation like this, though.

It should be applied in a fairly limited sense, not too broadly.

The more granular and restrictive it is, the more likely you are to add to it.

No common sense tweaks happening there.

If so, you'll have to add a good reason.

Something that can cause horns to grow that shouldn't.

Reason.

No, not necessarily rational, but something that could cause something to happen that shouldn't normally happen.

Anything goes, so plausible deniability.

Rationale for making it so anyway.

a.

I thought I knew what to do.

Use the Add Settings feature.

'I', by the power of the 'Unspoken', can 'cause' the 'horns of the succubus race' to 'grow back'.

Add very limited and restrictive settings.

The power to make anything possible, but not even I know where to start.

If it's a verbalization, it can be used as a basis.

[Adding this setting requires 10,000 achievement points].

becomes.

It's not a small price to pay, but I have over 100,000 achievement points.

There's no reason not to use it.

[Use 10,000 achievement points].

[Setting added].

It's a feature I only used again after a very long time.

I stare at Airi.

"You have horns."

"Ah....... Why the horns?"

"It will grow back."

"......?"

Airi tilted her head, as if she didn't know what he was talking about.

He doesn't know what happened to him, and she doesn't.

"It's just, you know."

"Uh....... Yeah."

If I explain the details, you won't understand anyway.

Only after the horns have grown back will you know what I meant.

I'll have to tell the other succubus the same thing.

You never know how the power to make someone dream will help them later.

As the former King of Heaven, Succubus Queen, and mother of Airi, Reina used the power of the Monma to terrorize and paralyze humans into submission.

Airi, however, uses it to save the suffering.

"Thanks for the kind words, Valerie."

Airi grinned at what could have sounded like some sort of malicious prank, depending on your perspective.

"Because you say so. Like it's going to happen....... I have a weird feeling."

What Airi would look like if she really did grow horns again.

A little, I wondered.

\* \* \*

Herriot said there must be something we could do.

Olivia told me I didn't have to do anything, that I shouldn't do anything.

Airi seemed to have changed her mind.

I don't know what they think of humans, but they seem to have a lot of affection for children.

Lerouen and Galarsh were out of the palace, and the last person left was Eleris.

"Ah....... Your Highness."

Charge, not degradation.

I wonder if they've cleaned up their titles now that they're kings," Eleris said, looking at me from the throne room.

Was it possible to be a king in a day?

I became king, not to rebuild the realm, but to deal with the Gate debacle that eventually happened.

In the end, I won't be able to escape the shackles of being a gatekeeper.

One way or another, the gate was bound to happen.

If I hadn't done anything, would the gate have happened in some way?

I don't know.

However, Eleris is the one who caused the gate, and I want to do something about it.

Elise was sitting alone at the table, scribbling away at whatever it was she was doing.

"What were you doing?"

"Ah....... new magic....... I've been thinking about."

"Magic?"

In response to my question, Eleris continued with a gloomy expression.

"There will be a lot of people who have lost their homes....... So we'll need a place to house them, even if only temporarily....... I thought I'd try my hand at creating some magic to organize a temporary home for that sort of thing......."

"Ah."

I couldn't help but notice the misery on Eleris's face.

It's a very strange thing to do, to try to fix a disaster you've created.

She would rather wish for death.

Saving people had ended up like this, and no matter how much pressure she was under, Eleris had activated Akasha with her own hands, with her own will. To save me.

I was told that the Akasha I used was gone.

Akasha itself was already otherworldly, so it didn't technically disappear, but Akasha became the Gate itself.

Gate events are not something you can bite off.

That's why the guilt she's feeling now is more than she can handle.

Letting her die might have been a good choice for her.

I can't imagine the miserable feelings and guilt that Elise must be going through as she does this with an overwhelming amount of guilt.

Elise and I would be sinners.

Ellen seemed to think this was all her fault, but I don't think so.

I'm grateful to the three of them for trusting me in this situation.

But I don't blame Ellen and Charlotte for not believing me. They didn't believe me, and I think I had a lot of evidence to back that up.

Resentment and hatred won't solve anything. The real enemy I have to deal with is not Ellen or Charlotte, but the monsters at the gate.

So the blame for this whole mess falls on me and Elise.

Eleris seemed to envision that kind of magic, to make a home, even temporarily, for those who had lost theirs.

It's a small piece of magic, but it's absolutely necessary in this situation.

That won't be the end of it.

If I hadn't met Elise, if I hadn't met the demon spies, the gate incident would not have happened.

Still, on the road to Akasha, I told Elise that I wouldn't regret any of this.

Even if our meeting is remembered as something to regret, I decided not to regret it.

It all twisted and turned to get here, but I chose to do it, and I don't regret it.

"I don't regret it."

"......."

So when she heard me say those words again, she hung her head in dismay.

"Because there's still work to be done, and I don't think the price we pay will necessarily bring only bad things, because I don't think it will......."

I put my hand on Elyse's shoulder as she bowed her head.

"Anything we can do, let's do it."

There's nothing I can do about Eleris's guilt.

No matter how much pressure was put on her, she made a choice.

The world and me.

At the crossroads, Eleris was the one who should have chosen the world.

It certainly was.

I regretted so much killing, and I wanted to make amends, even if it was just a little, so I should have never activated Akasha, even if it meant abandoning Eleris.

However, Eleris abandoned the world and chose me.

Everyone else will point to Eleris as the guilty party, and the world should be unable to forgive her for causing the Gate.

But I shouldn't.

No matter how much responsibility she felt, no matter how much pressure she felt from others, Elise made her own choice.

You don't even have to ask why.

He would have traded me for the whole world because he loved me, because he valued me.

You destroyed the world.

To the one who loved me enough to do so.

Why.

Shouldn't you have let me die?

I can't say that.

The world, even my own people, may come to hate Eleris as much as the source of the horrors to come, but not me.

I must love Eleris.

I have to be on Eleris' side.

"Too....... Too....... I'm sorry. I've done everything....... I'm afraid I've....... I have ruined......."

"No, it's fine."

It's not okay, but.

You should say yes.

To the heart of Eleris, in this love.

I am grateful.

"charge to....... No....... to lose you....... It would be....... to lose you too...... too....... So scared....... So sad that it all has to end like this....... Too sorry to....... So sad that....... to lose you......."

A sobbing Elise hugged me.

"No matter what....... I didn't want to lose......."

Eleris held me close and cried for a long time.

I hugged her, too.

Like you're never going to let go again.

Episode 456.

The day after capturing the Edina Archipelago.

I thought almost half the vassals and soldiers would flee.

To my surprise, there were less than a dozen people who rejected me and disappeared.

The devil has taken the country.

For the people of the House of Edina, that would be deprivation.

But to vassals, soldiers, and citizens, it would mean something else.

The weak royal family is gone, and an absolute called the Demon King has taken its place.

And this is an island.

There's nowhere to go but up. Sailing the oceans to the continent is only for the bravest of captains and sailors.

So there was no choice but to fear the new demon, but to stay and hope that he was not as frightening as the world perceived, rather than to reject him.

As such, the majority of royal vassals and troops had very few deserters. So where did the missing ones go, I rather wondered.

In front of me on the throne, an employee of the royal administration in charge of damage control began to stutter and say things.

How many houses were destroyed, how many people were killed, how many people were left homeless, and how much relief was available in the city.

Honestly, it fell on deaf ears.

I'm bad with numbers.

With so many deaths translated into numbers, I found the list of numbers more complicated than sad.

"Okay, first of all, can we get enough relief to the refugees?"

"If we start supplying them now, they can survive, but there is a general lack of facilities to house the refugees. The favorable season means they won't freeze to death, but....... Whether winter won't come until after the massive renovations are done....... We don't really know."

In attendance were not only vassals and soldiers of the kingdom of Edina, but also my own people.

Herriot and Airi stood on either side of me, and Ellerys was behind me, minus Galarsh and Lerouen, who were away.

Riana is getting married because she doesn't know how to run a country, and Olivia is on her way to Razak city to treat the wounded because she hates helping people but will do it because I want her to.

"What are the numbers of refugees?"

"About eight thousand people."

Eight thousand people.

Eight thousand people were left without a place to stay. But the number of people actually in need is five times that, more than 45,000, the representative reported.

It may seem like a lot, but if we had been any later, eight thousand people without a place to stay could have become forty-five thousand.

"I think we should set up a large refugee camp on the outskirts of the city......."

The vassals' faces turned grim.

I know it needs to be done, but is it really that easy?

It's hard enough to think about feeding and housing eight thousand people.

Even if you spend a royal fortune feeding them, there's a limit.

Believe it or not, they can't trade between continents. So importing materials and food is out of the question.

And the construction period.

If we can't provide refugees with a warm place to sleep before winter arrives, they will freeze to death.

Food, shelter.

Ritualism is a problem for individuals, but at scale, it's a headache.

"Hey, Elise, what happened to your house-making magic?"

"I think it needs a little more work, but....... I can probably have a draft in two days."

As I talked to Elise in the throne room, I could see everyone was panicking.

House-making magic.

Wizards are an extremely rare resource in the first place.

It's a temple, so there are enough wannabe wizards to run over.

So even if magic could solve the problems in the southernmost part of the continent, there's no way it could do anything because wizards are so few and far between.

Temple's talent is picked and chosen from across the continent, so it's not surprising that some things are commonplace.

The benefits of magic are very hard to come by here, as I've seen a Templar and a Captain of the Guard fall to a single blow from my sword.

"Even if you build a house, you still need materials. How do you pay for that?"

"There's a lot of wood, we can cut it down, and even if we don't, we can make up for it with magic that interferes with the natural world, so I don't think you need to worry about that."

"People?"

"I think I can do this on my own."

When the wizard announces that he will single-handedly build temporary housing for the eight thousand refugees that are needed, all of the vassals' faces begin to change.

The problems of royal vassals are solved by a single wizard.

I have three Lord Vampires to begin with. All of them have already reached the level of Archmage.

And to my right is Herriot, who can do magic that even they can't imagine.

Magic can be the answer to most problems.

It's just important that the number of people who benefit from the magic is extremely small.

And it's even rarer to have the benefit of an archmage who can do this.

They will know in less than a week that my rule can only be a blessing to the people of the archipelago.

"What are you surprised about?"

I laugh at my dumbfounded vassals.

"I am the devil."

We've started to rule them with fear, but we don't intentionally create fear.

Because there's really no reason to.

"No matter what you imagine, you'll see more than that."

In more ways than one.

\* \* \*

I decided to do what I could.

Of course, there is no such thing as a grandiose goal of creating an ultra-fair, perfect state for its citizens.

I'm going to organize a country that runs the way I want it to run, a country where I can do what I want to do.

As a result, I may wish people peace and well-being, but it doesn't change the fact that I am a dictator.

I will conscript if necessary, I will take the property of the citizens, and I will make them move at my command if that is what it takes.

The first thing I did was capture the Edina Archipelago.

While the gate situation has been initially wrapped up, urgent action on the four hard-hit ports must be prioritized.

We'll also do the following steps at the same time

I chose the Edina Archipelago as my base because it's a place where I only need to take down four gates to be immune to the gate events on the continent.

Countless cities will be destroyed, people will be killed, and a great deal of land will be turned into an uninhabited landscape where monsters roam.

There are also many towns and cities without gates.

They suffer additional damage as the monsters in the gate proliferate.

It is difficult to defend such places. The monsters will continue to pour in, and my forces, while soon to be replenished, are limited.

So the next goal is to rescue people from the continent and relocate them to the Edina Archipelago.

You must rescue survivors from cities, towns, and monsters that could fall at any moment and relocate them to the Edina Archipelago, which is out of the gate's reach.

Warp gate systems are not available.

So you have to physically move people around.

Next, I convened the captains of the large fleet remaining in the Edina Archipelago.

The faces of the shipowners were understandably filled with horror as they realized that the throne of the Edina Archipelago belonged to the Devil.

"As Lord of the Edina Archipelago and King of the Demon Realm, I hereby commandeer all ships, captains, and crews, effective immediately."

If you think I'm just going to be a good lord, you're wrong.

I will take it away, if necessary.

"Speak up if you have any objections."

No ordinary king, but a horned demon.

Archdemon.

I'll take full advantage of the fear that comes with my name.

You will arbitrarily imagine that you will suffer something worse than death if you refuse my command.

That imagination, too, helps me dominate.

Naturally, everyone was horrified and no one objected.

"First, we will organize three fleets, each of which will pick up refugees from the three affected ports and bring them here to Rajaq."

The ship's owners are all white-faced because they're about to be eaten alive, but the vassals nod when I tell them I'm doing it to house the refugees.

"And then we organize the largest fleet we can find to head for the continent."

The vassals' expressions turned puzzled as I told them that I was heading to a continent that had already become a hellhole.

"Soon, my armies will cross the oceans and come here. The fleets will be tasked with periodically traveling back and forth between the continents, transporting the people of the continents and my armies at regular intervals."

Galarsh is currently traveling to his stronghold in the Gelkorgis Desert to rally the cultists.

You can't move them all with a mass teleport.

Therefore, I will organize a large fleet to relocate them to the Edina Archipelago and place them under my control.

An archipelago isn't going to be populated by people.

The good news is that there are many uninhabited islands in the Edina Archipelago.

There's a lot of land.

So it's just a matter of clearing and settling to make it habitable.

A place where you can avoid continental catastrophes and live without worrying about monsters.

The Edina Archipelago will provide refuge for people.

"In the long term, the uninhabited islands of the Edina Archipelago will also be expanded and colonized to make them habitable."

It may be possible to turn a small island nation to the south into a major power in a makeshift refugee camp.

However, it is hoped that this island region, far away from the continent, will provide people with a place to hide from danger.

I want it, and I'm going to make it happen.

That's not all.

Demons of the fringes.

They may not be directly affected by this gate, but they may be affected in the long run.

You will also need to work on subjugating them and integrating them into your faction.

And a port connecting the Edina Archipelago to the continent.

That port probably had a gate incident as well, so we should start taking action there as well.

Organize an army to rid the continent of the monsters that have overrun it, and base it at the continent's ports.

There was a lot of work to be done.

Too.

There were too many.

\* \* \*

A city in ruins, in the middle of nowhere.

-Puuk

Atop a mountain of corpses, Ellen Artorius drew her sword.

In a mountain of tangled human and monster carcasses, Ellen slowly rose to her feet as the last of the creatures gasped for air.

Atop a mountain of corpses, Ellen looks around.

Amongst the charred buildings, the Imperials were just wrapping up the battle.

After descending the mountain of corpses, Ellen puts the ramen into the sheath of her sword and opens the collar of her cloak.

There was a mixture of awe and respect, admiration and fear in the eyes of the soldiers as they watched Ellen descend from below.

As a vanguard, he entered the ruined metropolis alone, slaughtered dangerous monsters, and fought alongside the main body.

In effect, she was single-handedly responsible for exterminating the city's monsters.

"Hey, are you okay, warrior......?"

"Yes."

With a cold, impassive demeanor that wouldn't hold a toothpick, Ellen nodded.

In the distance, someone came toward Ellen.

"Are you okay? Shouldn't you get some rest? You haven't slept in days."

It was Ellen's classmate, Heinrich von Schwarz. Ellen shook her head at her classmate's concern.

"...... is fine."

Heinrich, a Pyrokinetic, headed off somewhere, leaving a note to keep an eye out for him when he had time, as the battle was now over and he would be tasked with burning the corpses.

In a time when the Empire is one man short, Temple's combat-ready students are being dispatched across the continent to exterminate monsters.

Countless soldiers, knights, and students died.

For not believing in the Devil, humanity was paying a steep price.

Two years after Gate.

Yet, humanity has not reclaimed all the land.

Ellen's eyes were empty, as if she'd seen so much death that she'd grown accustomed to it, both monster and ally.

Then, on the edge of a burning city, Ellen saw a group of refugees carrying sacks being led by soldiers.

"Were the survivors....... were there?"

At Ellen's question, the soldiers shook their heads; there could be no survivors in the already ruined city for this long.

"They're not survivors, they're refugees. They found them on the outskirts of the city."

"ah......."

"They said it was saying weird things."

"......Strange?"

At Ellen's question, the soldier gave her an ambiguous look.

"Yeah, they say there's paradise if you go south....... So I was on my way south......."

Paradise.

Ellen looked around.

Burning streets, mountains of bodies.

Soldiers and knights who have grown so accustomed to the corpses that they no longer even gag at the sight of death strewn about.

Hell is temporal, and people have become familiar inhabitants of it.

Where in this hell is paradise?

You've just destroyed what might have been a paradise.

Where in the world can we find paradise and rest.

With so much despair in the world, people began to believe strange things. That there might be hope somewhere.

Ellen is the one responsible for this hell.

That's why I couldn't rest.

He doesn't believe in a paradise that doesn't exist; he believes his only job is to erase hell from the world, bit by bit.

With that thought, Ellen set off in search of her next mission.

Episode 457.

Very few countries were intact.

"We have word, Your Majesty, that the Special Forces, led by Ellen Artorius, have succeeded in reclaiming the Lambator Principality."

"......Yes. That's good."

From his throne in the Realm of Reality, Bertus nodded slowly as he stroked his scepter.

Last month, Imperial Emperor Neliod de Gradias passed away.

The Ancestral Emperor survived the Great Demon War, but after the events of the Gate, his strength began to decline and he eventually died.

The responsibility, guilt, and gravity of the situation ultimately killed the emperor.

Bertus de Gradias inherited the throne without even a proper coronation.

The emperor's position was taken in a way that Bertus never wanted.

The twilight of humanity.

In a moment that can only be characterized as such, Bertus was fighting a war for the fate of humanity.

Mindless monsters rampage across the continent, driven only to kill humans.

No negotiations, no diplomacy.

It was a war whose sole purpose was the annihilation of the other.

And everyone had some responsibility in all of this.

The devil himself.

The Demon King's men, who activated Akasha to save the Demon King.

An empire that didn't believe the devil.

But the details didn't spread, and most people only knew at face value that it was caused by the devil.

Only the Popes of the Five Great Houses, the Grand Master of the Crusade Knights, and a few members of the Imperial Family, including Ellen, knew of these events.

After Gate, things were looking bleak, but not without progress.

"Your Majesty, the 1st Commando of Shanafel, led by Sir Saviolin Tana, has succeeded in propagating the Warp Gate of Hashfell, capital of the Kingdom of Haig."

"......Good."

While Ellen Artorius and her squad were tasked with killing all the monsters in the ruined city, Saviolin Tana had the even more dangerous task of getting there before them, destroying all the warp gates that spewed them out, and then fleeing the area.

If Ellen moves to repair the region, Savior Tana works to repair the region.

Both were on a very dangerous mission.

Their roles were crucial now.

Saviolin Tana as the undisputed strongest human being. Ellen Artorius is the savior of mankind with two holy relics.

In a world where Olivia Ranze and the Devil have disappeared with the holy relics, she is the hope of humanity.

More than just talented, they were two powerful crutches for a desperate humanity.

The belief that Ellen Artorius will save humanity.

Of the Five Great Lords, Tuan and Als chose the Demon and those who disappeared with him.

Thus, the martial religion of Ellen Artorius as a prophet had already begun to encroach on folk beliefs, with unsavory results.

The power of the Empire declined, and many empires collapsed.

Even the countries that have managed to hold on have barely managed to hold on to their capitals and a few key cities.

You must destroy all the warp gates on the continent and slay the otherworldly monsters scattered across the land.

The rebuilding of humanity begins after that.

But will that day ever come?

'Reinhard.......'

Bertus gritted his teeth.

'Yeah, I was wrong. I was wrong about everything, one through ten.

I didn't believe it because I couldn't believe it.

In return, I was forced to stand at the crossroads of humanity's downfall and rebuilding every moment.

The Imperial Zodiacal Gradient was filled with shantytowns teeming with refugees from vast regions.

We couldn't leave the people who had been rescued from the monster's clutches alone, so we had to bring them back to the imperial capital.

They had to survive somehow in this part of the ecliptic.

Relief supplies are scarce, and there is no bread to give them, which inevitably leads to criminal activity.

The shantytowns outside the boundaries of the ecliptic were, therefore, a vast frontier.

You never know when they might suddenly turn into a mob and storm the palace.

Where is the legitimacy of an empire when a mob of helpless subjects descends upon the palace, and what can you do but kill them all?

In the two years since the gate incident, the size of the ecliptic gradient has more than tripled since the refugees arrived.

It was not uncommon for monsters from the far reaches of the ecliptic to wander the land after exiting the gates and raid the outer reaches of the ecliptic.

And that wasn't the only problem.

The refugees in the shantytowns are refugees who have found their way to the ecliptic in one way or another, and most of them have been helped by the Empire.

Soon, there were quite a few people who had experienced Ellen Artorius' greatness firsthand.

After Ellen slashed through hundreds of monsters, many were rescued.

As such, most of the refugees were believers in Shintoism.

"The persecution of believers in Tuan and Als is....... is crossing the line."

"......Yes."

Tiamata and Alsbringer chose the Demon.

As such, while the Warrior Cultists don't like the other Five Great Houses of God, Tuan and Als are practically demonic religions.

It was not uncommon for followers of both denominations to be stoned to death, and for Tuan priests sent to treat the wounded to be verbally abused.

An insubstantial faith was becoming increasingly entrenched in the folklore of the powerful Ellen Artorius.

And other issues, such as the warrior faith.

"Your Majesty....... I am honored by your words......."

Bertus narrowed his eyes, as if he knew what he was talking about.

"Another round of protests to get Charlotte out?"

"......Yes."

The enraged Championists wanted a scapegoat.

Charlotte de Gradias is clearly cursed by the Devil.

The Heroic Cultists had already gone beyond the rumor that Charlotte was cursed by the Devil and were screaming that she was probably a collaborator of the Devil and should be killed.

The protests calling for the empress to be killed had already gained the support of a large crowd.

It's no good saying that killing the Empress won't change anything.

The most important enemy is the Devil.

But the devil is nowhere to be found in the world, so people want a scapegoat.

People were shouting that Charlotte de Gradias, the Devil's collaborator, should be killed.

However, there is only one reason why the followers of the Dragonlord religion have not gone beyond protesting.

This is because Charlotte's guardian knight is Ellen Artorius, the savior of the humanity they worship.

The more Ellen is involved, the more her beliefs are reinforced, putting Charlotte's life in danger.

But that's exactly what was happening, with Ellen's fame becoming a shield for Charlotte.

\* \* \*

After completing his morning duties, Bertus visited the Palace of Spring.

Entering the sparsely populated but heavily guarded Palace of Spring, Bertus headed straight for Charlotte's bedroom.

In the bedroom was his brother, Charlotte de Gradias, sitting in the dark.

Charlotte had been in that state for some time and hadn't been able to get back to normal.

"Brother."

"......."

Charlotte cocked her head and looked at Bertus.

Charlotte, with her black hair and red devil eyes, was not allowed to go outside.

To anyone who saw her, even Bertus, who was trying to protect her, it was clear that Charlotte's form was cursed by the devil.

Even worse, Bertus realizes that it's actually a fusion of the demon and Charlotte's soul.

She's not cursed by the devil, she's possessed by the devil's spirit.

The crowd would be even more rabid if the truth were told.

If you put a demonized Charlotte in front of an unspecified number of people and tell them that the Empress is actually innocent of any wrongdoing, who will believe you?

Who would believe the Empress, who embodied ominousness itself?

"Have you eaten?"

At Bertus's question, Charlotte shook her head.

Bertus pulled up a chair and sat down at Charlotte's bedside.

After the events of the Gate, monsters also appeared from the Gate hidden in the basement of the Palace of Spring.

Charlotte used her powers to defeat the monster and destroy the gate.

But after the dust settled, Bertus explained everything to Charlotte.

Apparently, the demon was really trying to stop this.

While it's clear that the devil's minions caused this, Reinhardt doesn't think he really wanted it to happen.

A desperate brother who had been used by the devil from start to finish, wondering if he could ever get back on track in this bizarre form.

I'm not being taken advantage of.

It's hard to believe, but Reinhardt really cared about people, and he seemed to care about you.

He wondered if that would help Charlotte.

But as it turns out, it was the biggest mistake of all.

As if they regret some of the things they've said.

Unable to breathe, Charlotte fevered and lost consciousness.

Afterward, upon awakening, Charlotte began to act as if she had lost most of her speech.

For the sins of speech, I've stopped saying anything but the bare minimum.

However, Charlotte was locked in her bedroom at the Palace of Spring and couldn't or wouldn't come out on her own.

Bertus had a hunch that Charlotte was driven by remorse for the many curses she had spoken to the demon, for the many times she had felt betrayed by him.

You've been used by a demon.

So he cursed the man who had saved him so many times to die the most miserable death in the world.

Like Ellen, there were many who felt it was their responsibility, and Charlotte was one of them.

Charlotte was in shock and guilt.

In the form of a cursed horror, he is unable to help anyone, or even take a step outside of the Palace of Spring.

So Charlotte was slowly sinking into darkness where spring should have been.

The crowd wants Charlotte dead.

As his hatred of the Devil grows, so does his hatred of Charlotte.

If there's a critical mass of people who say we can't kill the devil, so we'll kill Charlotte instead, then Charlotte may indeed be the scapegoat.

Bertus held still, squeezing Charlotte's shrunken hand.

It was slender.

"Brother......."

"......."

It was a competitor I hated to kill, but at some point I felt sorry for him and couldn't hate him anymore.

Two years after Gate.

Now Bertus wanted to protect Charlotte at all costs.

But.

One day, Bertus may have to hand Charlotte over to the crowd himself.

Now you may be forced to make the decision to kill Charlotte with your own hands, even though you don't want to.

Charlotte and the Empire.

Weighing the two on a scale, Bertus is forced to choose the Empire.

Because emperors are supposed to.

"I'm having a hard time with....... It's hard......."

With those words, Bertus walked away.

After Bertus left, Charlotte stood still, staring out the window of the Palace of Spring.

Even if the world ends.

Even if humanity's fortunes were on the line.

Even when a dark cloud hangs over your mind, and the darkness threatens to consume you.

The sun was shining.

\* \* \*

While Ellen is taking on the monsters as humanity's hope, the other students at Temple are also in the fray, each with their own mission.

-Kyaaah!

"Hmph!"

As the three-headed snake slithered across the floor in front of him, Ludwig dodged the attack with a fluid motion and swung his sword at the snake's head.

-skuck!

Enveloped in a fiery blue aura, Ludwig struck down one snake's head, and when another tried to bite his arm, he gave it away.

-Bam!

Rather, Ludwig stuck his hand into the snake's gullet and, with a hand burning with blue magic, yanked out the snake's tongue, while simultaneously cutting off the other's head.

-Thump!

The three-headed snake's body began to wriggle on the ground, and Ludwig stepped back in a cold sweat.

"Whoa....... Whoa......."

"Ludwig! Up!"

"Huh?"

Once the giant snake was dealt with, a giant flying creature began its descent, sharp claws outstretched to snatch Ludwig from the sky.

But before the creature's claws could reach Ludwig, flames struck the creature's head.

-Quack!

The impact of the explosion sent the behemoth reeling, and it slammed into the ground to Ludwig's right.

"Hmph!"

Ludwig immediately plunged his sword into the flying creature's head, and it soon stopped struggling.

"Woohoo....... Thanks, Delphine."

"Careful, you keep forgetting there's more than one monster."

"It should be......."

Ludwig looked around, brushing the blood and oil from his sword.

Temple's students were also being sent into combat, though not on missions as dangerous as Ellen's.

"But spirits, that's really interesting."

Ludwig said as he looked at the strange creatures, neither ghosts nor monsters, floating beside Delphine Izadra.

"Because whatever helps in this situation."

The flying creature that had just struck was a bird-like spirit with flames floating to Delphine's right.

During the fight against the Gate, Delphine Isadra, naturally gifted in archery, took to the field with a bow.

But in a moment of crisis, when Ludwig was about to lose his life to the monster, Delphine summoned a spirit to protect him from the attack.

Neither Delphine nor the Empire knows what a spirit is.

I could only assume it was some kind of unexplained power, akin to a superpower.

Delphine doesn't know why the spirits are helping her.

The Empire was interested in Elementalism, but there was no such thing as time to study it.

Delphine Isadra, the only elementalist in the world, summoned the spirits of wind, fire, and thunder to fight.

'Reinhard.......'

Ludwig heads to the next fight, sword in hand.

Ludwig gritted his teeth as he stepped over shattered buildings and the bodies of dead soldiers.

"One day, I'm going to make you pay for all of this.

The controlled truth is that more people still don't know.

That's why the world is full of devil-haters.

\* \* \*

Over the horizon, masts begin to rise one by one.

"How many people were there last time you saw them?"

"Probably....... eight hundred?"

Herriot paused for a moment before answering my question.

Fighting monsters and rescuing civilians on the continent.

Refugees are escorted to Port Mokna, the port connecting the continent to the Edina Archipelago, where they are loaded onto boats and sent to the Edina Archipelago.

My troops on the continent were still rescuing displaced vagabonds and refugees, putting them on ships and sending them to the Edina Archipelago.

The Empire does not know that I have established a stronghold in the Edina Archipelago.

Port Mokna isn't that important, and the Empire has other places to worry about.

"You should have explained it better. I'm tired of seeing them freak out and jump in the water as soon as they get off the boat."

"I'm sure you did a good job."

"I hope so."

The Edina Archipelago is no ordinary place.

First, I, the leader, am the devil.

And some of those on the streets are demons.

From demons such as orcs and goblins to succubi, there were definitely ogres living on the Edina Archipelago, though not many of the larger species.

I'm tired of hearing people screaming that they've been rescued by mysterious people, followed a long sea path, and are about to be eaten by demons.

The good news is that the people of the archipelago have gotten used to the demons coming and going as they please.

Of course, I still see the occasional child peeing at the sight of an orc or ogre.

Fortunately, without any visible clashes, the demons and humans were getting along without too much trouble, if not completely merging.

It wasn't without its frustrations and fears.

However, that complaint was quickly put to rest when the refugees arrived and rumors of a continent gone to hell spread.

Because everyone knows that the only way to defy my rule and flee to the continent is death.

I was standing on the dock in Razak with Harriet. I was at the front of the line, and there were tons of people waiting to escort people from the refugee ships that were about to dock.

It had always been a large port city, but the size of the harbor was much larger than before, as large fleets of ships carrying refugees rather than trade goods were arriving and departing.

-sigh

As we waited to enter the harbor, Harriet and I could see one of the inyongs approaching us as we swam through the clear waters.

"Oh, there......."

"Uh."

Soon, the thing that was so close to my nose emerged from the water with only the top half of its body.

"Your Majesty, I've prepared the provisions you spoke of on the western shore, and they'll soon wash up on the current."

A being with the upper half of a human and the lower half of a fish.

It was Mermaid, or mermaids.

"Yeah, I'll put people on hold there, it's always a pain."

"No, we are honored to serve your majesty."

As sea-dwelling demons, mermaids could not be minions of the devil.

But for now, the beach is my home base.

The mermaids, who weren't exactly hostile to humans, became my allies in a way that scared me to death.

With food always in short supply, they were tasked with gathering marine food resources.

Their efficiency is unparalleled by fishermen, and they are in fact responsible for much of the food situation in the Edina Archipelago, especially in Rajak.

The red-haired mermaid, in the form of a woman, soon dives headfirst into the ocean and glides through the water, disappearing. Harriet watched in disbelief as the mermaid glided through the water.

"Mermaids are....... I think they're really pretty."

True to Herriot's words, mermaids are more beautiful creatures than I ever imagined. I didn't even know they existed.

Of course, she always showed up naked with her upper body completely uncovered, so I had to nag her for quite a while to put on some seaweed when we met.

He just showed up with a kelp-like thing across his chest.

As for the demons, well, aside from their ability to dominate, they're dead, if you ask me. The mere sight of my face thrills them.

So the demons were unconditionally on my side.

Anyway.

It's true that mermaids are pretty.

"I suppose so."

"......."

At my words, Harriet stares at me.

Uh, what?

Angry?

"Oh, no, what....... You said it first......!"

"Well. Idiot."

A fleet of ships approaches on the horizon.

The Edina Archipelago is a place where distance from the continent is usually a fatal disadvantage, but in this case, it could serve as a refuge for all those affected by the Gate.

One by one, the ships pulled in, and one by one, the evacuees disembarked, led by the soldiers.

Fortunately, the captain and crew had done a good job of explaining, and while the evacuees seemed to be frightened by the demonic landscape, they didn't scream or try to run away.

They've seen hell on the continent. They have nowhere else to go, and they have been wandering aimlessly, fleeing monsters.

Not knowing when they will die, their only option is to live among the demons.

Evacuees have been living in temporary shelters for some time.

The succubi were lined up at the entrance to the huge temporary shelter where they would arrive.

All of them had regrown all of their horns and were much more numerous.

By my word, all the severed horns of the succubus that should not have grown back grew.

Some of the succubi stayed by Airi's side, but many returned to the Darklands.

I brought the succubi back to Darkland.

Succubi with regrown horns.

Frightened by the demons, but mesmerized by their appearance, the refugees stare at the succubi in a daze.

It was the same for Herriot.

"Who would have thought succubi could do that......."

As Herriot says, it's ridiculous.

Right now, the succubi were acting like psychotherapists.

Episode 458.

Most of them have lost family members and have fled from the clutches of monsters that would traumatize them for the rest of their lives.

So their mental state can't be normal.

You run for your life, and when you're running, you don't think about it, but when you get to an archipelago and you're at least out of harm's way, you're hit with the aftermath.

On the contrary, after reaching the Edina Archipelago, many of them took their own lives as they thought about what they had lost.

As Airi said, something that allows them to escape the hell of reality, if only for a little while.

It worked better than I could have imagined.

It makes you dream of peaceful images.

This had the side effect of making the evacuees obsessed with the succubi like they were looking for a drug, but in the end, it definitely helped to give them a little peace of mind after the hell they had been through.

Soon, succubi were counseling each evacuee, listening to their stories and, if necessary, controlling their dreams so they wouldn't have nightmares.

Originally, in Razak, the capital of the Edina Archipelago, the reputation of succubi like Airi had fallen into disrepute.

Public opinion even turned ugly when it became known that they weren't even human, but succubus.

But not for the refugees.

The succubi who smiled, listened, and comforted them upon their arrival in the fearful land of demons were to the refugees angels in demonic form.

So the refugees love the succubi more than they love me, the demon king, and they love their leader, the succubus queen, Airi.

What is a dream.

Even when they know that the little reprieve they find there can't change reality, they still want to dream happy dreams and love the succubi who give them to them.

You can control humans with dreams other than nightmares.

During this time, I learned something new about myself, as well as the succubi.

"Your Majesty, all personnel have disembarked."

It was a pale-faced being in black robes who came to me.

"Good job."

All ships with sails have a set sailing speed.

And since ships have been sinking with refugees at sea during storms, I have assigned mages from the Lord Vampire clan to be in charge, one for each ship.

With the wizard's help, we can sail safely through rough seas and travel quickly through calm waters.

"Also, the Thunder King is said to be returning soon."

"......Ah, okay."

When he finished, the fleet captain stepped aside.

Herriot pursed his lips and watched the vampire's retreating back.

"Riana is....... Do you think she'll like that nickname......?"

"If you don't like it, you're going to hate it. You're going to love it."

"Is that......?"

You said something about a thousand kings.

At some point, people started calling Liana de Granz the Brainiac.

And judging by the fact that he didn't say anything about it, I think he liked it.

Riana was in charge of evacuation missions and base defense at Port Mokna, the continental connection to the Edina Archipelago.

So, in effect, it was Riana who saved most of the evacuees.

On the continent, Riana.

When you reach the archipelago, Airi.

I was in charge of the refugees.

"I think we're done disembarking."

"......what?"

I thought it was going to take a while, but have the evacuees been disembarked by now?

Herriot shakes his head slightly.

"Maybe the numbers are a little low....... Um....... not?"

"Nothing happened. Let's go back."

"Yes."

This time, the evacuees arrived safely, with little fuss or trouble.

We haven't had any extreme problems lately because we've done a good job of training up front, but in the early days we had a lot of really serious issues.

You're the one who gets scared and tries to run away.

There were quite a few guys on the street who said they would kill us all on arrival.

If the devil is the cause of all this, how can we live under his rule?

There were some people who said things that weren't technically wrong, but were just outraged.

And it was clear to me that this frustration and hatred was lying dormant among people.

\* \* \*

We know that the devil is responsible for all of this, and some people would rather die than live under his protection.

But all their anger and hatred cannot be expressed in front of me.

They know there is no substitute for me.

No one tried to do anything about it unless they were willing to die.

Of course, that means it was there.

I made no defense for myself, no excuses.

All they had to do was rescue them from the continent, give them a place to sleep and food, and make them part of the archipelago.

After the temporary shelter has cared for them for some time, they are sent to the frontier somewhere on Edina Island or another island.

Like it or not, it has to live its new life in a place we decide.

Feeding and housing them for free is temporary, but it's not like you're going to be responsible for them forever.

Just as those who arrive on the archipelago must get used to the intermingling of demons, they must also come to terms with the cause of all this: my domination.

I recognize that this vicious anger and hatred could be a knife under my chin, but they will know that there is no future for them if they do such a thing.

They know that what they eat, wear, and drink is maintained by the near-pro bono labor of demons.

Of course, they're not the only ones.

-Ohhh, His Majesty the Devil.......

-Must have left the inspection.......

Some of the people who saw me walking down the street bowed their heads deeply as soon as they saw me and didn't look up until I passed.

There are quite a few people who believe that I caused the Gate debacle, which is a rumor spread by the Empire.

If I did, there would be no reason to rescue and feed people like this.

It turns out that all the rumors about the Devil were just that, rumors, and many people actually believe that the Devil is good.

I'm actually the one who saved the entire archipelago, not just this one, but all of the gate incidents in the archipelago, by taking them down on the first day.

I said nothing that was true or false.

I didn't become king because of their support in the first place.

I have ruled them with power, and I have the strength to maintain my throne.

If my opposition grows too large, I have the power to purge them.

So whether they hated me or worshiped me, it didn't matter to me.

Some people hate me, some people worship me.

Actually, it's just something that happens all the time in any country in any era.

\* \* \*

Back at the royal palace, Alreal.

"Your Majesty, there has been a murder in the district south of the refugee camp."

"...... is it?"

After all, there is a lot of insecurity in the country, so we hear about these crimes.

Homicide.

But instead of being shocked by it, I found myself rolling my eyes and wondering if it was just another annoyance.

"Last night, two adult males got into an argument and killed the other by stabbing him in the nasal cavity, and the perpetrator is now in the custody of the refuge's security."

"...... Investigate, and if you think he's guilty, kill him. If you think he deserves it, send him to the slaughterhouse."

"Yes, Your Highness."

Sudden outbursts of violence from refugees are nothing new.

I've come this far in a bad way, and I can't afford it, so I can't even count stealing, and there are a lot of extreme cases like this.

The point is, crimes happen, but we can't afford to build prisons at scale to house them.

"Your Majesty, a field officer has been caught stealing crops from farmland beyond the eastern district of the refugee camps......."

"Send them to the labor camp."

"Yes, Your Highness."

There is an absolute shortage of prisons to hold prisoners, so they are treated worse than refugees.

Most prisoners are used for forced labor in large-scale quarantine facilities, not prisons. It's better to use them as labor than to kill them and remove their mouths.

At some point, everything becomes just numbers.

"Your Majesty, last night......."

"Your Highness."

"Your Highness......."

"Your Highness."

Literally.

I thought I was going to go crazy.

\* \* \*

As we walked down the hallway after the debriefing, Harriet asked cautiously.

"Why don't you take a few days off, and I can take care of the politics."

"You can't do it because you're better than me."

Her brow narrowed at my words.

"Why? Isn't that a good thing?"

"Ma, if you can get things done faster than me and make smarter decisions, what are they going to think?"

"ah......."

If the scribe under the king is better at being a king than the king is at being a scribe, there is bound to be distrust of me.

Obviously, Herriot will be a better judge of these headaches than I am, and he'll be faster.

"If you're going to do this for the rest of your life, I don't know, but if you're going to do it for a few days, you shouldn't, for your sake and mine."

It's not just a lust for dominance, it's that if you hand over the throne to Herriot, he'll have to do this for the rest of his life.

If I take over in a couple of days and people get a taste of what she's capable of, they can't help but think about that moment when she was regent.

Don't let someone too good take your place. Unless you're going to give them the job at all.

"I see. I didn't think of that. I just thought you looked so tired......."

Herriot carefully placed his hand on my forehead. Herriot's slightly cold hand touched my forehead.

Was there a column.

I'm not sure.

"Hey, you sneaky little brat. How many times do I have to tell you not to use your position to pester my highness?"

Herriot's expression turned sour at the words from down the hall.

It was Olivia Ranze, dressed in gray priestly robes.

"Oh, there she is again......."

"Why, can't I come here?"

"Why does your sister keep coming back and forth to the castle when she should be in the palace?"

"You don't think I don't know that you're trying to nail me to the altar with those words, and that you're trying to, uh, uh, just, uh, okay, kill me?"

"What are you really talking about, dumbass?"

I stare in disbelief as Olivia and Harriet get into a snowball fight.

Riana is a key frontline combatant.

Airi is a trauma nurse for the evacuees.

Herriot is my advisor and scribe, always there to give me input.

"I have a sermon to preach to the refugees who arrived today, but before that, I just wanted to see your majesty's face."

Olivia Ranze was the head priestess of the Unified Holy Order.

So.

Something akin to Protestantism was now the dominant faith in the Edina Archipelago, and Olivia Ranze had become its leader.

\* \* \*

A hermit cult in the deserts of Gelkorgis.

Based on the information Olivia had given them, the Gazoo Galarsh of Friday had led them from the desert to the southern part of the continent.

In the far reaches of the ocean south of the continent, the Demon King has created a nation, claiming the Demon Cultists as his subjects.

I could organize a large fleet and bring tens of thousands of Demonists to the archipelago.

However, there was bound to be some noise.

Their way of believing was bizarre even to me.

Call it primitive or call it brutal.

Cannibalism, human sacrifice, and other bizarre acts were not well-received by those who thought they were doing what the gods wanted.

He was not even a normal five major gods religion, but a demonic religion, and if he routinely practiced such things, he would never be able to blend in with the general public.

So, under my direction, Olivia Ranze carried out a massive proselytizing campaign against the Satanists.

They saw me, a demon, as an agent of the demons.

I was chosen by the two holy objects because the gods and demons are actually the same thing.

An old misconception.

The demons don't believe in demigods.

They simply believed in the gods of the five major religions, but through human misunderstanding, a strange faith called Demonism was born, but the source of their faith is essentially the same.

So it wasn't so much a Reformation as it was the clearing up of an age-old misunderstanding between humans and demons.

Unsurprisingly, neither the established Five Great Houses nor the demonic religions were willing to reform.

But I was chosen by the gods to be their agent.

And Olivia Ranze, who wields both Tuan's divine power and Kier's divine power, is proof.

The Five Great Shinto religions must accept demonism.

Demigods must understand that the Five Great Lords were in fact their own gods.

So understand that there is no need for cannibalism, human sacrifice, torture and penance.

That's how we worked on merging the gods and demons.

The process was by no means smooth.

There was a huge backlash from the extremists, both among the priests of the Edina Archipelago and among the Satanists.

People who were taught to hate each other had to recognize their shared roots.

As a result, extremists from both demonism and the Five Great Houses have claimed that I and Olivia Ranze are false prophets.

But the power was in our hands.

I suppressed the extremists.

Those who wanted to adhere to traditions that didn't make sense made them into human sacrifices that they wanted to do just as badly.

I captured the priests who screamed inquisition and tortured them until they admitted I was right. I made them stand in the square and preach a sermon acknowledging that I was right and that the gods and demons were the same.

There was no extreme genocide, but many people had to die.

My and Olivia's reformation ended with evidence.

Among the congregation there arose a group of people who accepted that the roots of demonism and deism were the same, and there were priests of deism and priests of demonism.

They sincerely believed in it and sought to understand it, and as a result, priests arose who were able to wield the power of the demons.

As Olivia Ranze did.

A series of events occurred that allowed priests of the Gods to use the power of demons and priests of the Demon Gods to use the power of the Gods.

That in itself was proof.

The priests had to understand that the phenomena were in themselves a proof, a phenomenon that could never be denied.

The gods and demigods are the same thing.

It's just that different beliefs about the same entity have generated different forces.

Those priests, in their newfound enlightenment, created a new religious concept called the Unified Holy Order, whose leader is now Olivia Ranze.

In the Edina Archipelago, it was now common knowledge that the gods and demons were the same.

And it was Olivia's job to tell those truths and give people a new place of faith.

Short-term, extreme trauma is taken care of by Airi.

Long-term sanctuary comes with a newfound faith in a holy order.

Ideological shifts can easily occur in extreme situations, and within two years, the mainstream faith in the Edina Archipelago was now a theocracy.

Demonists are a problem now and then, but they don't do cannibalistic human sacrifices like they used to. If I've gone from being the agent of a demon to the agent of the gods, they're pretty much all over it.

Demons are people, after all, and it wasn't that hard to integrate them.

But they are an army.

The power of the priests of the Edina Archipelago and the Order of the Five Great Houses was never very large to begin with.

The priests of the Demon Gods were now their own army, many of whom had access to the divine powers of the gods.

It is also true that many of these priests were sent to Fort Mokhna.

To me, the priests of Satanism, who wielded the power to heal and curse at the same time, seemed to be the embodiment of some inscrutable horror.

It's kind of like, "Is this okay?" when you look at it.

After all, we're all busy in our own ways.

Like Riana said, when I see everybody's bolded, I'm like, "What's the difference between this and the Four Thousand Kings?

Three of the Four Demon Kings are human.

Is this okay?

I suppose it's not that unusual, since Larken Simonstein was also a human during the First Four Thousand Kings.

"I'll go anyway. Don't push yourself too hard, my lord."

Olivia and I chatted for a while, and then she quickly left the palace because she had a sermon to give.

The head of the Holy Order, Olivia, is technically in charge of a very important part of my military power. She's also in charge of my civilian political operations.

From religious leader to Secretary of Defense to head of public affairs.

Without Olivia, my regime may not fall, but I will die of overwork.

Herriot glared at Olivia's back as she turned away, then sighed heavily.

"There's a Senate meeting coming up."

I nodded in agreement with Harriet.

Senate.

It's now a different name for the Vampire Council.

Episode 459.

Edina Royal Palace meeting room.

There, seated were the four Gajus, with the exception of Lucinil.

"Your Highness."

"Long time no see. Great one."

Eleris claims to be my servant, but the other three are not my subordinates; they help me as much as they can, but only to the extent that they cooperate with me, not to the extent that they submit to me.

Of course, Lerouen, Galarsch, and Antrian had all moved their clans to the Edina Archipelago.

Part of it was their desire to help me, but it was also because they couldn't leave their clans on a continent that had been torn apart by the Gate.

Now, the Lord Vampire's clans were also a very important part of my military power.

Vampires are usually mages, and the Lord Vampires, who can withstand the sun, were and still are a vital crutch for my rule across the archipelago.

Magic.

Without that crucial power, I would not have been able to provide shelter for so many refugees, construct new buildings, or grow food for them as quickly as I did.

Basically, humans are very afraid of vampires.

But when humans see vampires using magic to farm, growing crops and scrambling to feed themselves, they wonder what the hell this is all about.

Humans provide blood without being vampirized, and vampires provide food for humans to eat.

It's a bit of a symbiotic relationship, but what the heck, I've got grape juice down my throat.

So in reality, the Friday, Thursday, and Saturday clans didn't seem to mind the situation.

So the vampires, the most important part of my support base and my collaborators, were looking at me.

"Your Majesty, it seems that word of this place is spreading across the continent, albeit very slowly."

Eleris said.

Eleris worked mostly on her own.

I traveled from continent to continent, destroying as many warp gates as I could, doing what I could to end the gate crisis once and for all.

"Rumor?"

"Yes, we don't know if it's coming from refugees who refused to join us or not, but we've seen anecdotal stories spreading about paradise in the south."

The continent is a mess.

The Empire is busy doing what it does best, so it does not yet know of my presence in the far, far south.

Even if you know, you probably can't afford to do anything about it right now.

"Right now, there are only rumors that it's somewhere in the south, but no one knows for sure....... In the long run, powerful forces, including the Empire, will be searching the southern lands, possibly reaching Port Mokna."

"......Yes."

Port Mokna, our continental base.

It's a small, tiny dot on the continental map, but it can be a big deal if the Empire realizes it's not only unharmed, but has a large military presence.

If anyone in Port Mokna were to be captured, the Empire would know that a demon had taken up residence in the far, far south.

The Edina Archipelago will not be out of the Empire's sight for long.

The Gate Crisis has destroyed much of the foundation of humanity, but it will end one day.

That was the end of Elise's report.

"We're almost done installing water and sewage in the evacuation centers, and we're almost done clearing the large agricultural fields in the south, so now we just need to sow, and we've started building ships to transport supplies to other areas."

I nodded at Lerouen's words.

Thursday's Gazoo.

I don't know if it has much to do with it, but the vampires of Thursday were well versed in alchemy and other creature-related magic.

I wouldn't have thought to use it for farming.

One of the big advantages I have is that I can use a lot of my mages, who are a very high quality workforce, to produce or farm materials.

An empire can't do this.

There's only so much territory you can defend, and you never know when the monsters of the gates will roam the continent and invade your city.

It's a land safe from the gate, and you can focus all your energy on providing for your people.

"There's an abandoned magic stone mine near Fort Mokna. It can be mined, but transportation is expected to be difficult, so I would like the Thunder King to lead a force to transport it."

"Yes, I'll do that."

Magic Stones.

This is an absolutely scarce resource right now.

Basically, anything from streetlights to real-life magic tools. There wasn't a single thing that didn't have a magic stone in it.

The Edina Archipelago is not self-sufficient in magic stones.

With lanterns to light the night, the crime rate in the evacuated areas would be greatly reduced. As such, Galarsh had already secured a number of shuttered mines and quarries that served to supply the Edina Archipelago with magic stones.

Once you have enough magic stones, you can drastically improve your quality of life.

With the population of the Edina Archipelago exploding, it's safe to say that there's an infinite supply of magic stones.

Eleris, Leruen, and Galarsh have spoken.

Finally, Antirrhinus looks at me.

"Great One, it appears that the Empire has succeeded in destroying about 8% of the warp gates in existence."

"I see."

Antirrhinus is in charge of espionage.

As much as I've tried to rescue civilians here, and as many times as I've gone to deal with monsters and gates in the southern part of the continent myself, it's the Empire that's going to be the key force in the end.

We had already heard that the forces operated by Saviolin Tana were focused solely on destroying the warp gates of numerous cities.

Eight.

If all warp gates are destroyed, the gate event is over.

But there's also the long and arduous task of dealing with all the monsters that are already out there.

However, it will get harder and harder.

The fewer warp gates we have, the more powerful monsters will pour out of the ones that remain.

The end of the gate crisis is near, which means that each gate is becoming more and more dangerous.

"In addition, the Empire has succeeded in restoring all of its provinces, including thirty major cities, and is well on the defensive. From here on out, we will likely be assisting other surviving empires in restoring their territories. With this, I think it's safe to say that the Empire has fully regained the function of a state."

The Edina Archipelago is safe, but even on the continent where monsters rage like waves, the Empire has reclaimed territory lost to the monsters and restored full statehood.

I was reminded of the power of humanity.

I don't know if this is really good news for me, but Antony smiled softly.

"However, the population concentrated in the Ecliptic Gradient is now exceeding some forty million; large refugee camps have formed on the outskirts of the Gradient, the size of which the Empire is currently unable to handle; the streets of the refugee camps are filled with rags and filth, and the bodies of starving refugees are left unattended."

It makes sense that the ecliptic would attract people, and that was the case in the original.

This creates a vast law enforcement void.

The population of the ecliptic alone is comparable to the total population of the Edina Archipelago.

The empire cannot provide for them all, cannot control them, cannot guarantee their safety and livelihood.

The monsters that roam the continent will attack.

The Gate crisis was coming to an end, but other problems would plague the Empire.

Antirrhinus continues.

"In addition, distrust of the Five Great Houses has reached a fever pitch, and the Mercenary faith, which claims the warrior Ellen Artorius as its prophet, is believed by the overwhelming majority of refugees."

Forced Warrior.

Now that it's been revealed that I'm the Devil and the cause of this mess, Ellen is being forced to become the prophet of the Dragon Cult.

Antirrhinus laughs.

As if I'm enjoying the fact that I'm doing this for humanity, that I'm the object of hatred for the vast majority of humanity.

"The vast majority of refugees, as well as a significant number of existing Zodiac residents, are believers in Mercenaryism, and their frustration is reaching a boiling point."

"Complaints?"

What's wrong with believing that Ellen is going to kill me, since that's what martial arts is all about.

Is this a complaint about Ellen not killing me? Ellen probably doesn't even know where I am.

"The Dragon Cultists want to scapegoat the Empress, who is the Devil's inner circle."

"......."

Oh, I see.

\* \* \*

I had heard the stories about Charlotte. Stories of Charlotte's uncanny powers had spread.

It's not like I'm actually in league with Charlotte or anything, but the hatred for me is out of control and I'm still on a continent somewhere.

They're looking for a scapegoat they can drag in front of them.

As such, Charlotte, who had been kidnapped by the Demon King, and who had been close to me, was known as a priority Demon King contact.

It's ridiculous.

Ellen is a poor heroine who has been tricked by the devil all this time.

Charlotte was a collaborator with the Devil.

Antirrhinus continues to laugh.

He's fully cooperating with me, but at this point I really want to punch him in the face.

Crazy loyalists who are happy when their lord is unhappy.

Antirrhinus says.

"The Imperial House has been consistent in its staged responses to the demands of every crowd, but this could turn into a distrust of the Imperial House in the future. Perhaps the Imperial House is also in league with the Devil, and that's why they won't release Charlotte de Gradias, or something like that."

"......Yes."

People believe what they want to believe.

Why do you not kill the Empress when you should?

You're all in this together.

The story of why the Empress must die has already been told. You want to believe you're the devil's messenger, so let's go with that.

So they'll try to make everyone who tries to protect her into something they don't deserve.

If the martial and commoner demands for the death of the Empress continue, and the Empire continues to stage a response, there will be a riot at some point.

Killing the Empress solves nothing.

People are just pissed off.

I'm angry and frustrated and sad.

I can only hope that someone dies carrying this anger.

It's not the devil who doesn't know where he is, it's the maiden who is where she knows she is.

"Emperor Bertus must one day stand his queen before a crowd."

Bertus as Emperor.

An emperor must defend his empire.

You can't and shouldn't trade the reputation of the Empire for Charlotte's life.

As if against my will, the gate eventually happened.

Regardless of Bertus's wishes, Charlotte will end up at the stake at some point.

You must trade the life of the Empress for the wrath of the people.

"Great One, what would you do?"

Antirrhinus smiled broadly.

Charlotte cursed me.

I told him to die the most miserable death in the world.

I don't really hold a grudge. The misunderstandings I'd built up with Charlotte were enough to make me say that.

I wonder if Charlotte still hates me.

We don't know about that.

Once when escaping from the Demon Castle.

Once in the Palace of Spring.

I saved Charlotte's life twice.

So, whether Charlotte still hates me or not, I'm going to do it a third time against her will.

I swore I would.

I'll go through any night, I'll go through any hate, I'll go through any malice.

I will save Charlotte.

"I'm going to go see what's going on."

There's no telling when that will be, but I will.

\* \* \*

Teleport is a higher-level spell, and Mass Teleport is an even higher-level spell.

The only ones with enough horsepower to cast it are the Lord Vampires, including Eleris.

Herriot could cast top-tier magic with the aid of power cartridges, but he didn't use them because he couldn't get enough of them.

As such, only a small number of people can immediately return to the Edina Archipelago from the continent via mass teleportation, or be deployed to the continent.

-Pow!

For example, unless you're Liana de Grants, who is currently teleporting with Elise to the center stage of the royal castle, the number of people who can teleport to and from the castle is extremely limited.

The Lord Vampires of the Senate aren't here all the time, and they all have other things to do.

The scantily clad Riana looked at me and shook her head.

"Are you getting any sleep?"

"Aren't you going to sleep?"

Liana, now more commonly known by her nickname, King Brain.

The shield that protects Fort Mokna, and the mightiest spear that saves those chased by monsters.

"Ugh, I'm hungry. Let's get something to eat and talk."

"Yeah."

Despite the small talk, Riana has killed the most monsters and saved the most people out of all of us.

\* \* \*

Herriot, myself, and Riana sat in the dining room of the palace and talked.

A king's meal isn't exactly fancy. But it's not too impoverished either.

To put it bluntly, the meals served at the temple were not comparable to what we have now in terms of quality and quantity.

"There are no monsters or people around Mokna anymore. You have to go really far to see a monster's tail. I don't think we can do much more here."

Scouring the neighborhoods of fixed strongholds for people fleeing or hiding from monsters is no longer fruitful.

So, in the beginning, we had a huge number of refugees on the ships, and today, we only have eight hundred refugees.

"They say there's another port city about a hundred and seventy kilometers west of Mokhna, so we might as well secure that and base our search and rescue operations there."

"Okay, let's get a quote."

We'll take another stronghold, forward base it, and do rescues and monster exterminations from there. Riana asks, wolfing down the sausage.

"So the question is whether to ditch Mokna or keep it, what do you think?"

"Hmmm....... Having two forward bases doubles our chances of being spotted by the Empire, so it seems a bit unnecessary to keep an obsolete Mokna."

"But it would be a waste to throw away all the supplies and infrastructure that's there."

"Sure."

Putting aside the debate of whether or not to retire Mokna, I've been convinced of the need for a new forward base.

"By the way, ....... Are you sure you want to go directly to the Empire?"

This time, Herriot asked me.

"Empire? What are you talking about?"

Riana shook her head, not sure what I was trying to do.

"Lately....... there's a bit of a stir over there about executing the Empress. So he's going to see for himself what's going on in the empire."

"......?"

At my words, Riana shook her head.

"Wow....... I tend to think that you're the most sociopathic of the sociopaths, but....... Isn't this the first time you've crossed the line? It's bad enough that you're taking care of humans, but now you're taking care of an Imperial Empress who's an enemy?"

Of all of us, Riana is the one who wants to see the Empire fall and the House of Gradias destroyed.

Riana wasn't actually that close to Charlotte.

So it's no wonder she's so worried about the Empress of the Aptitude Nation that she's upset when I tell her I'm going on a scouting trip to the Empire.

She had heard everything that had gone on between Charlotte and me, so it was no wonder that she looked like she was about to drop a crane at my decision.

Well.......

Is this bullshit?

I'm not sure.

"Dude, I've been working a job I'm not cut out for for two years now. You know?"

"Playing king?"

"Yeah, I'm tired of sitting in my seat all day listening to you. It drives me crazy."

"Well, you've been pretty good so far, and on the subject of demons, what the hell are you going to do if the king isn't your cup of tea?"

"It's something I've done reluctantly, and it's not something I'm cut out for, but I'd much rather be out on the continent slaying monsters, and sometimes when I see the fungus next door begging me to punish him for breaking my bowl, I'd rather leave the city and tear his thrush to shreds."

"Oh, I forgot to mention......."

Herriot was next to me at the time, so he knew what I was talking about.

I've gotten a lot of whiners asking me to do something for them.

It's enough to make you panic that you're going to die of high blood pressure.

At my words, Riana looked at me, a bit stunned.

"Oh....... You're so stressed, you......."

"I don't want to say this to you because you're on the front lines, but I'm sick of this shit, I can't do it."

Two years is a lot.

It's not something I have the aptitude for or talent for. I did it because I had to, not because I liked it.

And the more you do it, the more it chips away at your mind.

Harriet can take over for a while. And I'm sure she's better at it than I am. But it's a lifetime job, and I can't pass it on.

And Herriot had so much more to do as a magical expert than just a scribe.

So, you need someone who can sit for the rest of their life.

I'm going to make a regent out of somebody who's more talented than me and who's going to do a better job, and I'm going to make them do it for life.

"I don't know how I'm going to do it, but when I get a chance, I'm going to bring Charlotte over and let her play king for me."

At this point, I'm not saving Charlotte.

Charlotte is saving me.

You've saved my life three times.

It's okay to try to get paid now, right?

Episode 460.

That night.

King Edina's bedroom.

I was sitting on my bed, watching Harriet dry her hair.

Herriot had now changed out of the clothes he had been wearing just moments ago and into his pajamas.

"Get some sleep. You've got a lot to do tomorrow, and you're going to the Empire."

"......You should."

If nothing else, Harriet and I have been sharing a bedroom for about six months now.

There are two beds in the king's bedroom. One is occupied by me, and the one next to my bed, slightly further away, is occupied by Harriet.

We share a bedroom for one reason.

Assassination threats.

The actions of those who hate me become visible and manifest.

It doesn't happen too often, but when it does, it's persistent and tries different things.

It was a poisoning, a midnight raid.

People in the castle were often collaborators.

They're not even bought.

In some cases, people who would normally hate me were merely cooperating in an assassination plan.

There was also the time when Harriet and Olivia were forced to save him from dying after he ate a poisonous snake.

Herriot, who normally researches new magic and magical items, has taken on the role of scribe and is never far from my side.

After that, Harriet started doing poison checks on everything I ate and drank, and I even bought the talent Poison Resistance with achievement points.

I was able to cope with a physical attack because of the warnings of my sixth sense, but only those who have been through it know the eeriness of seeing the face of a familiar human being holding a dagger to my windpipe while I slept.

A lot of people hate me.

Even the humans of the Edina Archipelago, whom I saved, hate me because they know that the Devil is at the root of all this.

It happened even after we replaced all the heavy users with people who had nothing to lose from the Gate debacle.

All humans hate me to a greater or lesser degree, and I couldn't have the entire workforce of the kingdom composed entirely of demons who would obey my every word. The issue of discrimination and the subordination of humanity was only going to cause more backlash.

I wasn't the only one suffering from the raid, either.

I won't die, so I'm going to kill everyone around me.

If only.

I once fell asleep and woke up to find Antirrhinus standing outside the palace, tied up and chuckling at me.

What do you think it would be like if it wasn't you, but a wizard from the Empire or the Black Order.

It was a bad move on Antony's part, but the memory of it still sends a chill down my spine.

I'm safe because the Empire and the Black Order don't know where I am yet. I realized that a wizard of Antony's caliber could take my life at any time if he wanted to kill me.

It's not completely unprotected, but it can be breached at any time.

So, ever since then, I've been sharing a bedroom with Harriet, and it's become a habit of mine to go to sleep with a number of magical devices and covenants in my bedroom as a seal.

At first, both Harriet and I felt weirded out by each other, but time is a medicine and we've gotten used to these things.

I couldn't help but notice that the Devil was rumored to share a bedroom with a scribe every day.

Olivia was surprisingly not upset about it.

He was actually worried about me because he knew I was under that much threat of death.

Anyway.

It was starting to become known that I was practically married to Herriot, but I couldn't help it.

In the end.......

I have to say that now I'm kind of like, is there really anything different about that?

In fact, in some ways, Herriot is more situationally competent than the Archmage of the Senate.

In most crises, I'm the physical one and she's the magical one, so naturally, Herriot and I spend the most time together protecting each other because of our complementary nature.

After drying her hair, Harriet sat down on her bed and placed the scrollbook on her bedside table.

"I put in the teleportation scrolls. I have over twenty of them, so you can always use them if you're in a hurry."

"Okay."

"Do you want me to come with you?"

Her hair untied, Harriet stares at me.

"No, I don't think it's a good idea to go. I'll go alone. It won't be dangerous."

You'll be disguised as Sarkhegar's ring, so you won't be recognized.

It's not like I don't know what's going on, and I don't think it's a pretty sight for anyone in the Empire to see. I'm going to go quietly, alone, and come back quietly.

I lay down on the bed, and Harriet sat back on the bed with the spellbook she had been looking at, spreading the book between her knees and opening it to the middle page.

A faint yellow glow of magic illuminated the book Harriet was looking at.

"I'm always growing up and you're not?"

"Sleep as long as you want."

As if to say never mind and grow up, Harriet waved at me without looking at me.

I was busy, but I knew it was going to be tiring for Harriet, who had to coordinate what I needed to do and make sure her bedroom was safe.

Honestly, I'm feeling it too.

Somewhere along the way, Herriot's magical achievements stalled.

Whenever he has time, he's doing the research he wants to do, but his time is so limited that he doesn't get much done.

Herriot is actually the perfect person to be a researcher.

But there's no one else, and there's no one else I can trust, and you're too good for that, so you're my secretary and bodyguard.

I have a lot of work to do, and I can't do any of the things I really want to do.

So this short time before I fall asleep, when all I have to do is stay with it.

During that time, Herriot sneaks in some reading.

I think Herriot would have loved Akasha.

However, Akasha is gone.

As such, the magical achievements of Akasha's long history have been transformed into a shadowy otherworld.

How much magic was in Akasha.

Now it's just not there.

The sound of a book being turned over in silence.

I listen to the page turn very carefully, not wanting to disturb my sleep.

I look at Harriet's face as she looks at her book.

"Pfft."

"Yes."

He doesn't even look at me when I call him Paxton anymore.

I don't call it that because I'm actually a scribe.

When it's just the two of us, or as we used to call it back in the day, I can only say one thing.

I wonder if that's why Herriot isn't mad at me.

Because you know that only in this moment can I call you that.

"Thanks."

At my abruptness, Harriet looks at me with a gentle smile.

"Me too."

What are you thankful for.

I feel like I'm always taking and never giving.

I couldn't figure it out.

Harriet turned back to her book, and I closed my eyes.

\* \* \*

-Pow!

Through the warp point, dozens of people appeared in the middle of the square in a flash.

Warp gates were currently unavailable, so troop movements over very long distances now had to be done manually by wizards with access to mass teleportation.

Given the circumstances of the Edina Archipelago, it's no wonder that the only people who can move via mass teleportation are a small, elite group.

And now, appearing through the warpspot, was Ellen and her immediate troops.

Ellen was scheduled to report for duty in the ecliptic and then head straight to the next point.

-O.......

-You are a warrior.......

Ellen Artoraus had become a celebrity for lack of a better word.

The state of the empire was such that, in terms of crowd confidence, Ellen was more popular than the Emperor.

So, it's no surprise that a cloud of people gathered around Ellen.

"Warrior, our savior!"

"Where are you headed this time, warrior?"

"Warrior....... Thank you for saving the day!"

Ellen has saved many lives. More than I can count.

"Warrior, you look great!"

"Warrior!"

"Champion, watch over us......."

"Why doesn't your sister come to the zodiac so often?"

It had become so familiar that Ellen was no longer surprised by the sight.

However, Ellen was afraid that people in despair and pain would project their hopes onto her.

You're the cause of all this.

People believe in themselves.

She blames the devil for everything and loves herself.

I didn't have to run around trying to save people.

If I had believed Reinhardt back then, none of this would have happened.

You didn't save people.

Everyone is in this pit of despair, and it's their own fault that they can't even wear the right clothes, that they're like rags.

"I love you, warrior!"

It scared Ellen that so many people were finding hope in her.

It's all my fault.

It's my fault.

Don't like me, don't love me, hate me.

It's me who should be hated, not the devil.

Ellen was occasionally overcome with the urge to say something like that.

But I couldn't intentionally bring despair to those who found hope in me.

To those who somehow endure this miserable life by hating the devil and believing in the hero.

I couldn't intentionally feed those victims the hopeless drug of truth.

People find salvation in Ellen.

That's why people who get excited about the ecliptic don't turn into mobs.

If Ellen says it's all her fault, people won't believe her at first, but even if they do, it's a problem.

The moment the crowd realizes that the warrior and the empire have made a mistake, the empire falls.

When empires fall, there is no humanity.

"Will your sister kill the demon for me?"

"ah......."

A little girl clings to Ellen's arm and asks.

Demon.

The eyes of those who believe that killing the devil will bring peace to the world.

From a child's longing for hope to an old man's hateful glare.

The hope of humanity.

As its spokesperson, I can't help but feel that one day I'll be forced to stand before Reinhardt.

It was, and Ellen was afraid.

\* \* \*

Central Palace Tetra.

"Cairnstadt's capital, Köln, is fine, it's which of the satellite cities we restore first that matters."

"Yes."

Ellen had just finished debriefing Bertus and they were discussing what to do next. Ellen stared at Bertus, who looked tired.

Even the most powerful empires had only succeeded in defending a few cities, including the capital. The Empire had restored all of its direct territories, and now had to decide which of them to fully support.

From now on, the restoration of Cernstadt, the capital of the First Reich, would begin.

All warp gates in Cernstadt territory had been destroyed.

So all you need to do is eliminate the monsters lurking around the city.

But that's easier said than done, and a lot of soldiers, knights, and wizards were going to die doing it.

We're rebuilding an empire at the expense of human resources.

"What do you think?"

"I think we should start by clearing the perimeter of the cities that have been successfully defended, rather than trying to restore them one by one. We've already....... There will be few survivors in the fallen cities, so I think we can work on that later."

"......Yes, that makes sense."

Bertus crossed his arms, contemplating.

"Charlotte is....... What do you think?"

Bertus clicked his tongue at Ellen's question.

"......."

Ellen is a hero of the Empire.

So, just as I'm tired of being told to kill the devil, I'm also tired of hearing the misconceptions about the Empress.

The Empress is cursed.

Beware of the maiden in case the warrior takes damage.

Ellen is often away from the ecliptic, and when she returns, she tends to check on Charlotte's condition. After all, Ellen is the Empress's guardian knight.

But Ellen couldn't open Charlotte's closed mouth the way Bertus could.

Though she couldn't speak, Charlotte burst into tears when she saw Ellen.

Just as Ellen was beating herself up, Charlotte was beating herself up.

The moment we looked at each other, we realized that all of this had happened because we didn't trust Reinhardt.

Just like Ellen blamed herself for everything. Charlotte was also blaming herself for everything.

Even if they couldn't talk, Ellen couldn't help but feel for Charlotte as she watched her fever rise.

The bottom line was that the majority of the crowd now wanted the Empress dead.

"Other than that, is there anything else you need on site?"

"As always, it needs a power cartridge."

"Of course....... I don't know when we'll have a mass production system in place."

Power Cartridge and Moonshine.

As Reinhardt had intended, the power cartridges were now the most vital commodity on the battlefield in the event of a gate breach.

Mages, who drew their magic from power cartridges, were a formidable force on the battlefield.

The close combat students who had taken Moonshine were improving at a rapid rate. In fact, the number of those awakening to the power of magic was growing exponentially.

So there was a bizarre phenomenon going on where the dying military forces were being more or less made up for by the growing strength of the existing military forces.

It was probably created to make the Demon King's army stronger.

What Bertus had thought of as a prized possession had now become an indispensable commodity.

Only after everything happened did Bertus realize that the choice he should never have made was the only right answer.

We should have let the devil go free.

Even though he knew that regret was useless, Bertus was plagued by it.

In all of these situations, everyone blames themselves.

Charlotte said to herself.

Ellen says to herself.

Bertus also.

That you are responsible for everything.

That's what I was thinking.

"Did anything in particular happen that you want to talk about?"

"......."

Ellen was silent, and then something occurred to her.

"I heard there's a paradise down south."

"Paradise?"

"Yeah, I think some weird....... beliefs are spreading."

"......Yes, that's what you want to believe."

In times of overwhelming desperation, strange things can be made up.

So Bertus had no choice but to dismiss the rumors as false.

Episode 461.

Ellen can't stay on the ecliptic for long.

They are to be reintroduced to the field immediately after completing the bare minimum. This was partly due to the state of the Empire and partly due to Ellen's own will.

After a quick chat with Bertus, Ellen made her way to the Palace of Spring, as she always did.

No one was allowed anywhere near the Palace of Spring. Of course, Ellen was not bound by such things.

Arriving at Charlotte's bedroom in the Palace of Spring, Ellen sees exactly what Bertus had seen earlier.

Sitting on her bed, hugging her knees, she stares blankly out the window.

Charlotte de Gradias in devilish form.

Assimilated by the demon's spirit. The demon's spirit caused her to become this way, but it also caused Charlotte to stop eating grain, which weakened her but did not kill her.

"Charlotte."

"......."

At Ellen's urgent call, Charlotte slowly turned her head to stare in Ellen's direction.

Red eyes with a vertical slit in the pupil.

They were eyes that would send a chill down anyone's spine, but Ellen saw nothing but sadness and regret in them.

Looking at Ellen, Charlotte buried her face between her knees.

Ellen watched as tears, dried and unable to come out, soaked the camisole Charlotte was wearing.

We all know that regret leads to nothing, but we can't help but regret it.

If I had believed Reinhardt.

That one word has been responsible for many of the tragedies that have befallen mankind.

Reinhardt was gone, and humanity was doomed.

So every time they looked at each other, they could only reaffirm each other's sins.

Ellen can still do something. She can do something like save people.

But Charlotte can't even show herself to the crowds, so she can't do anything but stay locked up in the Palace of Spring.

Ellen slowly walked over to Charlotte and sat down on the bed.

Then, carefully, he picked up the tiny Charlotte.

"Soon, we'll be able to destroy all the warp gates on the continent."

"......."

"And if we slowly kill all the monsters on the continent, this whole situation will be over."

"......."

Saying what she can't even comfort herself, Ellen hopes that Charlotte can somehow ease her guilt.

"Then people who lost their homes will be able to find them again."

The dead can't come back.

"Everyone will find their own place and....... and live like we used to."

Nothing can bring back a lost home.

"It's going to take a long time, but little by little....... and everything will be back to normal, back to the way it was."

Once a relationship is broken, it can never be repaired.

"So let's hang in there. A little more....... A little more......."

As she spoke, Ellen bit her lip fiercely as she remembered the many things her words were ignoring.

I could taste the fishy taste of blood through my torn lips.

"......."

"......."

"We are......."

Ellen's voice is finally, finally shaky.

"Can I be forgiven......?"

To Reinhardt.

To the world.

I want to be forgiven, but I know I can't.

Charlotte cried.

Ellen couldn't even cry.

\* \* \*

The more Ellen looked at Charlotte, the more she felt miserable.

Ellen and Charlotte weren't always on the best of terms, but now that things have come to this, they've become more than just guardian knight and lord, they've become an odd pair of shared guilt.

It was a relationship bound by grief and guilt.

They were projecting the same emotions onto each other.

That's why Ellen can't turn her back on Charlotte. Even though she knew she couldn't make Charlotte better, and even though she knew she wouldn't get any answers, Ellen sought out the Palace of Spring when she returned to the ecliptic after a devastating day of battle.

That things are getting better.

I've always said that.

Technically, I'm not lying.

Moving from worst to best can only be described as things getting better.

I mentioned that I saved a few people today.

That wasn't a lie either.

They just didn't say how many people died.

He also said he drove the monsters out of the ruined city.

He's not lying either.

I didn't say there wasn't a single person alive in the ruins.

I have not told a lie, but I have not told a miserable truth.

Even though I know Charlotte can read between the lines.

With that, Ellen left the Palace of Spring and the Imperial Palace, leaving Charlotte behind, unchanged.

From the hill at the entrance to the palace, Ellen could see the temple beyond Irine the Great.

The temple had already been repaired after the meteor's destruction.

The cradle of talent, home to some of the world's best minds, is now a military base that trains warriors.

With intercontinental connections cut off, Temple was now conscripting and training any evacuees who showed the slightest flair for combat.

Instead of screening people and charging expensive tuition, the Temple now equips those who want to fight with weapons, teaches them to fight, and then sends them into the field.

Even if they do have moonshine, most of them are sent into battle as soldiers, unaware of their enchantments, and die countless deaths.

While a select group of Temple's existing students were fighting, the new recruits were mostly vengeful ruffians.

The Empire's current state of affairs necessitated even such fools.

As many people as she saved, Ellen knew that there were countless others who volunteered to fight and died like daylight because they admired the warrior who saved them.

The Temple, once a cradle of talent, was now breeding moths.

Royal class, none of Ellen's classmates have died, thankfully.

I feel terrible that I have to characterize that as a good thing.

And having to use the word "yet" felt eerie to Ellen.

The time is night.

I had a bit of time to kill before I had to head out on my next mission.

Afraid that people would recognize her, Ellen wore a hood.

Ellen was no longer tired of fame, she was afraid of it.

As Ellen walked through the streets of the ecliptic, she felt a stirring behind her.

A lot of people, but someone looking at you.

Such a pretense.

When I turned my head, there was no one there.

"......?"

Something was clearly looking at him.

Ellen walked down the street again, feeling strange.

\* \* \*

I didn't wait around thinking I'd see Ellen.

I knew that as busy as I was, he was going to have his hands full.

However, as soon as I arrived in Huangdao, I heard people in the streets talking about the return of the warrior.

Ellen is on the ecliptic.

Just in case, I stood idly by the entrance to the palace.

I waited quite a while.

So I could see it.

I could see his face, even though he was hooded.

I looked at Ellen, who looked even more aloof and cold than before, and there was an indelible look of fatigue on her face.

Maybe I should have said something.

If I talked to him, I could have had a normal conversation with him.

But it's been a long time coming.

I don't know what Ellen is thinking.

Ellen was instrumental in getting me out, but now I don't know what she's thinking.

You may hate me, and you may be feeling sorry for me.

It's not the time to say how are you, but I thought we could talk about something.

I wanted to grab him and talk to him.

But this is not the Ellen I knew, the Ellen I met as a student in the Temple Royal class.

Ellen Artorius.

The hope of mankind and the arch-enemy of the devil.

Just as Ellen is no longer a Royal Class student, I am no longer the Reinhardt who was a Royal Class student.

It's just a dichotomy between hero and devil.

We shouldn't meet.

You can't and shouldn't talk about it.

I don't know when my impending doom is going to be right under my nose, but if we talk about it, we're only going to make each other suffer more.

So I was content to watch from a distance.

No.

I wasn't satisfied.

I haven't seen it in two years.

There's no way I could ever be satisfied with that.

I wanted to see more.

But I couldn't, so I'm not sure they're getting along, but I know they're getting along somehow, and that's that.

I walked the ecliptic.

I could see nothing but pain in the faces of the dead, exhausted, and distressed.

The gate also happened in the ecliptic, so even if you're a resident of the ecliptic, you haven't lost anything.

Most of us have lost a parent, a sibling, a child, a family member.

In desperation, there were those who were going somewhere because they had to.

In the midst of all the despair, there were definitely some hopeful faces.

-The warrior is back!

-You must have killed a lot of monsters this time.

-Will you slay the devil someday?

I could see the hope in the faces of the people talking about Ellen.

Hatred and anger toward the devil.

Someone to take those negative feelings and turn them into hope.

Warriors.

In this zodiacal gradient of depression, anger, and hatred, Ellen was the one thing that gave people at least some hope.

Fear and hatred were producing stories and rumors, as they always do.

-The king is returning to Darklands to gather the monsters of the Gate.......

-The monsters that roam the continent are not even a hair's breadth from the Devil himself.......

-No matter how brave you are.......

There seemed to be a consensus among the crowds in the Zodiac that I was not only in command of the monsters of the Gate, but that I had led them to complete the rebuilding.

Darklands?

I've never been there since I made the rounds to absorb the demonic forces of change.

-You have two holy relics, but so does the devil.......

-If you had been tempted by the devil in the temple....... I dread to think of it.

-That's why you revealed the Demon's identity so long ago. You know everything. He's not one to fall for a demon's tricks.

It was said that I had infiltrated the Temple to recruit the warrior Ellen Artorius.

What is a crowd.

They snack on their own imagined words, and before you know it, they start to believe them.

We don't even know who started spreading fake truths because the source has disappeared.

I was the ruler of a rebuilt Darklands, the most powerful in history.

It imagines at will, fears at will, and hates at will.

There is no such country.

There is a country in the Edina Archipelago, far south at sea, beyond your sight, and it is inhabited by men and demons, not the monsters of the Gate.

The more I think about it, the harder it is to believe.

A demon lives among the humans.

If I were one of them and not the devil, I'd be screaming at the person peddling that nonsense.

The idea that I could control and manipulate the monsters in the gate was a common one, among other bullshit.

He seemed to imagine that since he had caused this, he could control the monsters in the gate.

Why can't I just imagine that it's possible, and that if I truly hated humanity, I would have invaded the ecliptic long ago and wiped it out.

The truth is always irrelevant, because if someone makes an opinion like that, there will be another rumor to counter it.

And it wasn't just me that the rumors were aimed at.

-I wonder if the Emperor is actually being manipulated by the Empress?

-Yes, otherwise there's no reason to leave her alone.

-Even if she's important, it's suspicious that they don't keep releasing a demon-cursed maiden.

-If she's alive and well, she should show up, but she never does.

It's even suggested that the Empire's refusal to execute Charlotte isn't actually because the Emperor is being manipulated by the Empress.

-Ah, well, at least you're here, and if it was really like that, you wouldn't have done it.......

-That's true, but.......

In the end, Ellen was the brake on this one.

People believe in the omnipotence and omniscience of the devil, but they also believe in the omnipotence and omniscience of Ellen as their adversary.

If the Empress was indeed corrupted, why would her guardian, Ellen, stand idly by?

So the story and the mood of the execution of the Empress seemed to be in a delicate balance, not reaching any extremes.

-The Empress is one thing, but the three enemies are another.......

-Those chewing bitches are.......

Liana De Granz.

Olivia Ranze.

Herriot de Saint-Ouen.

Three students who sided with me and ran away from Temple together.

In the world of men, they were known as the Three Enemies, traitors to humanity.

Perhaps, because they were human, they were more hateful than I was.

\* \* \*

Refugee camps are located in the Edina Archipelago and also in the ecliptic.

The Edina Archipelago, however, had no monsters to worry about, allowing it to expand indiscriminately across all of its territory.

The ecliptic makes that impossible.

You can't increase your living space, and if you do, you can't defend it. You never know when the continent's roaming monsters will attack.

So the Empire doesn't do anything about the expansion of the refugee camps, but the people keep coming.

As we pulled into the vast refugee camp of crudely constructed shacks, I couldn't help but feel a strange sense of welcome. I couldn't help but feel an uncanny sense of welcome.

When I first arrived in the ecliptic, I walked into Eleris' shop, and a few days later I saw a group of beggars under the bridges of the Bronze Gate.

Beggars living in haphazardly constructed shacks, reeking of alcohol.

Rotary Club.

The landscapes of the past, where those people, now dead and gone, had lived, stretched to the horizon.

A vast land of beggars that opens up just beyond the borders of the Zodiac City.

Such was the reality of the great and glorious capital of the Gradias Empire, Gradium.

The hastily constructed shacks were not soundproofed, windproofed, or built to code, so the people lying in them were visible.

It smelled like filth, like something was rotting, and flies and other insects were hitting me in the face.

The conditions in Edina's refugee camps aren't great either, but they're nowhere near as dire.

I smelled smoke from a fire somewhere, so I walked over to see if there was a soup kitchen or something, but there wasn't.

It was the smoke of burning bodies.

There's a plague going on, but it can't be that bad because we have priests to deal with it.

They simply starved to death.

Children in wiry rows ran around near the smoke of burning corpses.

Even in this situation, the contrast between the smiling children and the misery of the people burning the bodies next to them was striking.

It's more like hell.

It was like looking at the landscape of a life that had been forced to adapt to hell.

I decided not to think about that.

If only it were me.

If only I wasn't there.

I couldn't help the reflexive thought that came over me.

"......."

The ecliptic gradient was hell.

Episode 462.

Things were better inside the city center, but in the shanty towns where the refugees live, one wonders if they will survive this winter.

Even an empire can't abandon them after all.

In front of a long line of people who were being rationed, I could see guards handing out something.

-Thump!

-I said no!

-Grandpa....... He might die from this.......

A loud noise came from somewhere in the shantytown.

-I don't think I'm going to be treated by a bunch of priests serving a filthy devil! I'm just going to die! Cancer! I'm going to die!

In one of the shacks, a priest, dressed in white robes soiled from being kicked out, slowly got up with a depressed look on his face.

Cult of Tuan and Alth.

People began to reject the gods in favor of demons.

Over the chatter of the crowd, Tuan watched the priest walk off into the distance, his head bowed in melancholy.

I didn't need to see this spectacle.

Enough about the reality of the empire.

But I couldn't leave easily.

I feel like it's my responsibility to put all of this spectacle in your eyes. I feel like that's the least I can do.

I knew that looking at all the horrible things that had happened to me wouldn't solve anything, but it seemed like the least I could do.

I pass endless vistas of broken lives.

As we approached the outskirts, the situation became more dire.

I could see maggots and flies clinging to the dead bodies between the shacks.

The Empire cannot support all these people.

You save people somehow, but if the people you save end up starving to death, what's the point of saving them?

The only outcome is death by monsters or slow death by starvation.

Just as I run mages to grow food in the Edina Archipelago, the Empire is doing something similar.

Add to that the manpower required by the Empire to defend this vast territory from monsters.

In addition to supporting existing empires, there are also people working to end the gate crisis.

The Edina Archipelago is a state where all resources can be used to support its people, but the Empire is not.

So people were dying for nothing in places the empire couldn't do anything about.

There is no anger or hatred in people's faces when they are overly desperate.

Shadowed by death, they lay in the streets, slowly dying because they didn't have the strength to resent the world.

We were almost to the edge of the refugee zone.

-Bang!

-Grrrrrrrrr!

-Crack!

-Monster!

I could see the monster rampaging through the shacks, smashing them to pieces.

A monster of a gate that came in from somewhere.

There are no guards in the middle of nowhere.

Even if it does, we don't know if it will be able to handle it or not.

A four-meter-tall monster with the face of a boar and the body of a gorilla.

Not many, but one object.

It doesn't seem like a very powerful entity, but if left alone, people in the refugee camps would be dying by the hundreds.

Civilians can't do anything about it.

In a no-man's land, it only takes one of those monsters to slip through, and people are dying by the hundreds.

There was no time to waste.

I run, activating the magic in my body.

It's a long way, but it's not like I'm going to be able to cover that distance in my mainstream car.

-Thump! Quack!

-Run! Run!

Rushing to the middle of a spectacle of people being mashed and crushed.

"Suck!"

-Woof!

As you raise your fist, you convert the energy in your fist into destructive power.

-Quack!

With a single blow of his enchanted fist, the creature's head exploded.

Although we still haven't reached the master class.

I am stronger than ever before.

\* \* \*

I didn't make it to the master class, but that doesn't mean I'm out of my depth.

Name: Valerie

Age: 20

Race: Archdemon

Current Stats: [Strength 26.4(A+)] [Dexterity 23(A)] [Dexterity 20.9(A-)] [Horsepower 41.9(SS)] [Constitution 25.8(A)]

Talent

[Superpower - Self-Suggestion].

[Superpower - Speech].

[Dominate Magic].

[nontechnical].

[Horsepower].

[Bifunctional resistance].

[Toxic Resistance].

Attributes

[Divine Spirit].

[Bloodline of the Warrior].

[cough].

Capacity

[Demon Dominion A]

[Self-implied S]

[Statement B]

[Enchantment A]

Comprehensive Ability Assessment - Demon

Combat Level Assessment - S

You earn achievement points for each monster you kill, just like you earn experience points.

Over the course of two years, as Edina's work increased, she became less and less involved in direct combat, but in the early days, she had to fight without a break to breathe.

It was a day of tearing up the land of monsters.

I invested my mountains of achievement points into bettering myself.

Personally, I wanted to maximize my horsepower numbers, but after reaching SS rank, it became impossible to invest.

I was unable to buy the top talents that had become too expensive, but I was able to re-bloom some talents.

But he had to focus on the business of being a king, so he spent more time on the throne after the initial fights.

That's why some of them never made it to the next level.

However, my basic physical abilities were extremely advanced, and my power levels had risen to bizarre heights, so I found myself in a situation where my power output was comparable to that of any master.

Without ever reaching the next level, they've developed a malformed growth spurt in which their basic abilities have become hypertrophied.

So the output itself is no less than any other master, and even more so. It just lacks sophistication and versatility.

In terms of horsepower, I'm now on par with Xavier Tana.

Of course, I'm not sure I'd win a fight with her.

-Woof!

The headless monster's body collapsed.

I was covered in the monster's flesh and blood, but it didn't stain my clothes because it ran off the magical barrier that covered my body.

In that short time, the monster had killed about a dozen people.

This happened less than a minute after the monster appeared.

-Ohh.......

-who, who......?

The fleeing men stared in disbelief as I neutralized the monster in one fell swoop.

He's been transformed by Sarkhegar's ring anyway.

No one will recognize me.

You don't have to explain anything, you don't have to say anything.

The moment you're about to leave.

-Cool!

Something like blood bubbled up from the dead monster's carcass, and something began to rise.

Tentacles.

Tentacles, as sharp as the awls that lurked in the corpse, shoot out, aimed at me.

"!"

-Ka-ching!

I summoned Alsbringer and struck down the tentacles.

The impact was too fierce for the sound of flesh and sword.

No matter how great my magical defense is, monsters are unpredictable.

I thought it was dead, but tentacles poke out of its corpse.

-Bam!

The flames from the fires of Hwaryo consumed the creature's body, as well as its flailing tentacles.

"......."

People look at me.

-that one.......

-that black.......

The way people look at me is fixed on my sword.

Recognizing holy relics is basically the food chain.

But the devil has two holy relics.

Alsbringer and Tiamata's looks have become as famous as Ellen's laments and lapel pins.

That's why people recognize it.

"Ma....... 魔王......."

One of the people who's fallen and is screaming points a finger at me.

"The mark of the devil!"

Mark of the Devil.

That was the new name for Alsbringer and Tiamata.

People gradually began to panic and run away.

-The king is here!

I didn't do it in hopes that anyone would notice anyway.

We already know enough about gradients.

I pulled out my scrollbook and unfolded the teleport scroll.

Watching them flee in terror, I stood still until the light of the teleport engulfed me.

\* \* \*

"What do you mean the devil has appeared?"

Just before Ellen left the ecliptic, she heard a strange story being talked about and came straight to the imperial palace.

Demon.

As soon as she heard those words, Ellen's mind seemed to go blank.

I couldn't bear not to hear what was going on.

So even Ellen couldn't afford the rudeness of a surprise visit from the emperor.

It was time to go to bed, but Bertus was in his office.

Bertus held his right hand to his temple, muttering to himself.

"It's not the first time I've seen bullshit come out of the refugee zone......."

The words sent a chill down Ellen's spine.

Rumor.

It's not uncommon for people to see things out of fear and panic.

Ellen felt a crack in her heart as she realized that she had finally been swayed by such a story.

"Technically, I think I saw an Alsbringer, not a demon, though I'm pretty sure it's an Alsbringer based on the physical description....... Then Reinhardt must be right."

Ellen's lips trembled as she heard the words.

If you've seen the Alsbringer, you've seen a demon, because its owner can't be anything else.

"They're saying strange things, that the devil brought monsters, killed the refugees, and disappeared......."

The little bird story had spread like wildfire. Ellen shook her head vigorously.

"No way....... You don't......."

"Of course, I don't know why or for what reason, but there was a monster on the outskirts, and Reinhardt killed it and went off somewhere, and who's going to believe the story that the devil saved the people?"

The monster that was attacking the refugees was killed by the demon and disappeared.

Those who saw it firsthand saw the demon slay the monster, but those who didn't only heard the story of the monster killing the refugees from afar and then the demon appearing.

The truth, that the demon had slain the monster that was killing the refugees and then mysteriously disappeared, was buried among the rumors that spread like wildfire.

The devil saved the people.

People don't believe it because there's no reason why the devil should.

So, a credible lie was about to become the truth.

"Damn, I wonder if Reinhardt felt this way......."

"......."

Ellen and Bertus were feeling Reinhardt's frustration in real time.

There's no reason for Reinhardt to do that.

If you really want to raid the outskirts of the refugees, you can't just bring in a single monster.

People believe what they want to believe out of fear.

I don't buy the story that Reinhardt would have burned down a whole neighborhood of refugees if he'd tried to raid properly.

I don't believe it because I can't believe it.

Truth doesn't work with a crowd that has gone mad with fear and hate.

How to believe in the devil.

Ellen and Bertus, who had distrusted Reinhardt under this notion, were now forced to watch with a pinched feeling in their stomachs as a believable lie, not the truth, spread among the crowd.

"That aside, what the hell was Reinhardt doing here......."

Ellen shared Bertus's doubts.

During this time, the Demon King, who had been unheard of since leaving the ecliptic, appeared in the ecliptic.

Suddenly, Ellen remembered how, not long ago, she had felt the sensation of being watched.

That uncanny sensation, the feeling that it must be an illusion.

No way.

"......No way.

When it occurred to her that it might have been Reinhardt, Ellen felt a pang of self-doubt.

On the subject of not trusting Reinhardt.

You're still under the delusion that Reinhardt might be thinking of you.

To think that Reinhardt might have been watching her, Ellen realized how ridiculous her delusions were, and how similar they were.

Reinhardt explains why this should be the case.

We don't know where, but Reinhardt has gone somewhere with people who believe in him.

There's no reason to find yourself again, no reason to wait and see.

It's been two years.

In the midst of all this misery, Reinhardt must have forgotten about himself.

Reinhardt didn't do anything wrong to Ellen.

The only person to blame is yourself.

So Reinhardt can forget himself. He has been betrayed.

He can't forget Reinhardt himself. He betrayed him.

That's why Ellen thinks it's impossible that Reinhard remembers her, that he remembers her, and that there's even the slightest bit of that left in him.

I don't think I deserve it, and I don't think I'm worthy of it.

"What the hell....... Why are you here......."

So why not the ecliptic, where it has never been before.

Why it appeared.

Neither Ellen nor Bertus could figure out why.

\* \* \*

Royal Castle, main port city of Razak, Edina Archipelago.

When I returned, Harriet stripped me of the robe I was wearing and wrapped it around me with both hands.

"How was the empire?"

"...... is not good, even in jest."

"......What was it?"

"We've long since passed the population limit of what the ecliptic can support. People come in droves, and we have to worry about them all starving to death. There's no policing at all in the outlying areas, and if you stumble across the wrong horde of monsters, not criminals, you'll be dead by the thousand in ten minutes."

At my words, Harriet let out a deep sigh.

"And then there was a monster in the Outer Rim, and it wore an Alsbringer, and I'm sure there will be sightings of me on the ecliptic....... I don't think it's going to happen, but I can see how this could turn into a rumor....... I don't know how this will affect me later."

"Alsbringer?"

"Uh, there's a slightly dangerous situation."

"Yeah, well, I'm glad you didn't get hurt anyway."

Harriet and I walked side by side through the bustling hallways.

The Devil appeared on the ecliptic.

I didn't do anything spectacular, but the story that I showed up is bound to have a huge impact on the ecliptic.

The majority of the crowd now knows that a demon could appear on the ecliptic at any time.

People are more afraid of me, and they might panic.

Should I have summoned Alsbringer despite the risk?

But there are plenty of monsters that can pierce Auror armor. Swordmasters don't die for nothing.

We don't know how the Demon's appearance will spread terror across the ecliptic.

Maybe I should have left it alone instead of taking matters into my own hands.

The thought of it made the hairs on the back of my neck stand on end.

Now I'm afraid to think about it casually.

Antirrhinus had told me about the ups and downs of the ecliptic, but seeing it with my own eyes made it all the more real.

The Edina Archipelago had its own problems with food, but compared to the ecliptic, it was a paradise. There were definitely people starving, but no one was dying.

Episode 463.

"Airi-san said that the psychological counseling for these new refugees will be finished in three days, so she'll probably bring me their personal information soon."

"Uh, yeah."

I don't know when the next evacuation ship will arrive, but the succubi are picking up the pace in managing the refugees.

Early on, the power to control dreams was overused, leading to the refugees falling in love with the succubus.

When grief and despair turn into obsession with the succubus, both the succubus and the refugees suffer.

It's been said that psychiatrists don't build very deep relationships with their clients.

The succubi have never done it before. They're not good at it, but they do it because they have to, so they can't be good at it.

It's been a while, though, and the succubi don't have that problem as often anymore.

Those with more severe cases left the temporary shelter and were regularly checked on by succubi, who would visit them to see how they were doing.

It's a place that goes beyond ritualism and takes care of spirituality.

If you think about it, it's a pretty good place to be.

Of course, that only makes me feel bad because I realize that I'm just cleaning up after myself.

As Harriet and I walked down the hallway, Antony stepped out from one side of the hallway as if he had been waiting.

"Ouch!"

It came out of nowhere, so much so that Harriet, walking beside me, let out a startled squeal and covered her mouth.

This old man pops up every now and then in the most unexpected places, catching people off guard.

She knows that Antirrhinus is the second most cooperative person in the Senate after Eleris.

But, like me, Herriot didn't trust Antirrhinus at all.

For one thing, who would trust a vassal to cure their insecurity by kidnapping the king in the middle of the night?

Antirrhinus removes his bowler hat and bows deeply to me.

"Great One, what was the canon of the ecliptic that you saw with your own eyes?"

Was that what you were going to ask?

"What the heck, I couldn't see it."

They wanted to see it with my own eyes and see me despair.

As if my reaction had been quite refreshing, Antony's lips twisted into a slight grimace.

What a nasty bastard.

"Have you thought of a way to bring back the Empress?"

"I'm not sure yet, I'll have to think about it."

"Wouldn't it be easier to surreptitiously tell them to give her up, if the Empire wanted to keep her in any way?"

I nodded at Antony's words.

"Yeah, it's not like I haven't thought about that."

If you talk to Bertus, he might give it to you.

"But the Empire won't have an excuse for the missing Empress, and that will put them in trouble. Bringing Charlotte back is important, but we can't let it cause more turmoil for the Empire."

All eyes are on the mysterious empress.

It's unlikely that the crowd would believe an announcement that the empress has suddenly disappeared. There is already a certain amount of distrust in the imperial family.

Bringing Charlotte on board wasn't just about saving one person.

The wrong move could save Charlotte, but it could also spark a massive riot, and seeing how the public sentiment in the Chinese zodiac was shaken, I realized the magnitude of that riot.

Either there's a riot and the empire collapses, or there's a riot and the empire slaughters the rioters.

The former is the downfall of an empire, and the latter is the long-term downfall of an empire by mass slaughter.

So I have to approach this with more than a little caution.

I don't necessarily want the empire to be intact.

But I also don't want it to die.

Until the gate crisis is fully resolved, and the monsters on the continent are wiped out, the Empire must exist.

That's why I'm not judgmental about this problem, which is easily solvable if you have access to it.

Antirrhinus smiles coyly at my cautious answer.

"That's one thing, but as for the matter of Lord Sarkhegar and the Lord of Demand....... What are you going to do about it?"

"......."

Antirrhinus touches my inverted lance.

The two.

Charlotte is Charlotte, but I still hadn't gotten them back from the Empire.

\* \* \*

That night.

I was in my bedroom with Harriet, organizing my day as usual.

I'd been to the Empire and talked to Antony, so I was feeling a little better.

He hadn't even considered rescuing Lucinil and Sarkegar, who were still alive.

There was so much to do.

No, actually, it's probably just an excuse.

I have declared to the Empire that killing Lucinil and Sarkegar will make us enemies. But I do not know where they are or how they are being treated.

The only thing we can say is that it's probably under tight control at the imperial palace.

Although Antirrhinus was spying on the ecliptic and the empire, he had no idea of their whereabouts.

The fact that I still don't know their whereabouts is already a clue in itself.

In future negotiations with the Empire, whenever and however they may arise, they will be a card the Empire can play.

I wonder if I can get them both in exchange for protecting Charlotte.

It was a problem we couldn't approach lightly.

"You'll both be fine."

I nodded in agreement with Harriet.

But I had my doubts.

"As you know, Sarkegar was responsible for the kidnapping of the Empress and Empress during the last Demon War. Lucinil may not know it, but....... Sarkegar may be dead."

The Empire now knows what Sarkhegar has done.

So, it might have killed Sarkeghar for doing such a thing.

And since he had such a Sarkegar as a servant, it may be that he still has hatred for me, thinking that the devil was evil after all.

Sarkegar.

More than anyone, Sarkhegar wanted to rebuild the demon world.

I had no intention of granting that wish.

Without Sarkegar, I was the king of a world that included demons, if not perfectly.

What Sarkhegar would say if he saw this.

You may be angry about how you can live among humans, or you may be thrilled to see the world rebuilt.

I wanted to show this world to Sarkegar, who had always been a loyal servant.

The fate of the world is always on high alert, but I wanted to showcase a world that I had somehow created.

Feel free to blame me, feel free to rejoice.

I want to show this to Sarkegar, but the thought that he might already be dead makes my breath catch in my throat.

I could put off thinking about my people who were confirmed dead.

But when I thought about my people, whose lives were in doubt, I felt like I was going crazy with anxiety.

I need to save them.

Should I be doing this?

Is it okay to keep putting it off because you have too much to do?

Sensing my anxiety, Harriet came to my side and put an arm around my shoulders.

"We're always doing the best we can."

"...... might not be the best."

"Well, you better believe it."

I gritted my teeth at Herriot's words.

Rusinil and Sarkegar, the problem that should have been solved but still wasn't.

New problem, Charlotte.

Can I solve these?

Like trying to save the world only to have it destroyed.

This time, can we be sure it won't fail?

I did it because I needed to do something, and I moved forward because I needed to move forward.

However, the horror of that terrible failure was still lurking inside me. I just didn't want to consciously face it.

Once again, the fear that my presence would ruin everything by itself was clearly in me.

\* \* \*

You don't know what to do or how to do it.

But now that you've seen the empire for what it is, it's time to carefully decide which path to take.

Herriot would always fall asleep in bed at this time, reading a book.

So I'd wake up in the morning and find him asleep with a book open in a squatting position. It was as if he had fallen asleep without realizing it.

Today, however, Herriot was curled up in bed, doing nothing.

As if you're standing still and thinking about something.

He didn't seem to be trying to hide it, but there was sadness in his eyes.

I thought I knew what he was thinking, to a point.

I've been to the Empire.

Empire.

No Man's Land.

At the end, I was found out to be a demon, but I made it through safely.

So it's only natural that Herriot would be thinking about it.

The idea that if I've been there, maybe you can too.

Just as I have a lot of work to do, so does Herriot. Maybe even more than I do, she has a lot of work to do.

So it's a natural thing for Herriot to think.

About the things you've left behind.

Three enemies.

The names of three people who betrayed humanity.

Olivia Ranze.

Liana De Granz.

Herriot de Saint-Ouen.

Herriot's case is different from the other two.

Olivia has no family, and Riana's only family, the Duchess, is living quietly in Edina's villa.

Herriot can't help but think about what he left behind in the land of men, and he can't help but feel guilty.

So, about the Duchy of Saint-Thuan.

He would think about his family, including his father.

A daughter who became a traitor to humanity.

He couldn't help but feel guilty when he thought about the Grand Duchess of Saint-Antoine, whose daughter was causing him real problems.

So even though she was outwardly fine and worried about me, she could have been the one suffering the most.

He's not the one paying the price for choosing the devil, his family is.

The Duchy of St. Thuan was also heavily damaged, but as Herriot said, the duchy's capital, Arnaka, was safe under the protection of the Archduke.

And now, the Archduke was serving the Empire in place of the daughter who had betrayed humanity. The Archduke must prove it. that it was his daughter who chose the Devil, not him and his duchy.

Thus, the Archduke, in the midst of a war for the fate of mankind, was being tortured to atone for his daughter's sins.

But even that may not mean much to the survival of the Grand Duchy.

The crowd needs a scapegoat.

The Archduke is now being excused for entering the Gate Crisis by the needs of the Empire and humanity.

However, if the Gate debacle were to come to a head one day, the Duchy of St. Thuan would likely be the first victim of an angry Imperial public.

The Grand Duke of Saint-Ouen, one of the three enemies who betrayed humanity.

You're not victimized because you deserve it, you're victimized because you're looking for a scapegoat.

No matter how much credit the Duchy of Saint-Thuan deserves for ending the gate crisis, the crowd knows no such thing.

So I'm sure she's reminded every day that her family and her people are responsible for her actions, not her.

Maybe even more than me.

Herriot could have been more painful.

But Herriot never said a word to me about it.

He'll think it's harder for me than it is for him.

I've been to the Empire.

So, it was only natural that Herriot would want to see for himself how things were going in the Duchy of St. Thuan.

You know you're safe, but you don't know what's really going on in Arnaka, the capital of the Duchy of Saint Thuan.

How the Archduke and his family are doing.

He wanted to see it with his own eyes.

"Don't."

"......?"

Harriet looks at me.

"Do you want to go to Arnaka?"

"Huh?"

She flinched at my words, and asked back.

There's a lot of work to be done, but just like I eventually made it to the Imperial Capital Gradient.

There's no reason why you can't go to Arnaka for a day with Herriot.

Like when I saw the Imperial Capital and had nothing but terrible feelings about it, but went anyway.

There's no reason why Herriot can't take the same path, even if it's one that leads to regret.

Her eyes widened, as if my words had been quite a shock.

"Now that Razak is more or less on track, I'm free for a day or so, so....... If you want to go, I'm free for a day. I mean, what's a day, I'm free for a couple days."

Herriot's family, especially the Grand Duke, may try to lock her up and not let her go if they see her.

But Herriot has been working for me for a long time.

I think she should have that option, after all she's been through and hasn't said anything about it.

To see family or not to see family.

At my words, Harriet bites her lip and goes still in thought.

It's up to Herriot to decide if he wants to see his family or not.

However, there is no risk in watching Arnaka with your own eyes.

Current in your hometown.

The least you can do is to see it.

"Will you go with me to....... with me?"

Harriet looks at me with trembling eyes.

Just like Herriot has protected me all these years, just in case.

It's only natural that I would follow along to defend Herriot, just in case.

"That's a given."

At my words, Harriet eventually burst into tears, covering her face with both hands.

"Thanks....... Reinhard......."

What in the world is he thanking me for?

I was always the one to thank.

Episode 464.

Just as empires defended their territories, including their defensible ecliptic, powerful imperial powers sometimes had cities that they could defend, including their capitals and megacities.

While many empires fell, there were still cities that survived and nations that defended their capitals.

The Principality of Saint-Thuan was one of the few countries to succeed in defending its capital.

This meant that the Duchy of Saint-Ouen failed to defend all of its territory except the capital.

A magical land.

Outside of the Empire, the Duchy of Saint-Ouen was the most adept at magic and had produced many of the best mages, and the capital remained intact after the Gate.

Arnaka, capital of the Duchy of Saint Thuan.

Arnaka was not a city that was sprawled out like the imperial capital of Gradium, where the entire city had been displaced by refugees.

Herriot and I teleported to an alleyway in Arnaka, then out into the street.

We could see the once glorious city of Madoh had been fortified.

I saw that the unwalled city was surrounded by thick walls, each with tall spires at regular intervals.

But the spire was not topped with a watchtower for reconnaissance, and atop it was a giant blue crystal floating in the air.

"Turret....... Sounds similar."

"Yeah, I think so."

Maybe a turret to intercept monsters as they approach the city.

That's what Harriet and I could only deduce.

I was disguised with the Ring of Sarkegar, and Herriot had also used camouflage magic to change his appearance and was wearing robes, so people on the street didn't recognize him.

States that only succeeded in defending their capitals were forced to become city-states.

Arnaka's situation was no different.

The refugees didn't flock here, because most of them were in the Imperial capital.

A city that hasn't expanded, but whose capital is still standing.

I don't know what the food situation is like, but I couldn't read the hunger on people's faces.

But it wasn't all happiness and hope, either.

It would be nice if the Empire could have a system like this, just like the Arnakas have turrets, but the scope of the Empire's defense is hundreds of times greater than the Arnakas'.

It would have taken most of Arnaka's remaining resources to construct a defense system with such massive turrets. There was a reason the Empire hadn't used them.

Herriot stays still, watching the streets and people of Arnaka.

There was an undeniable guilt and sadness in his expression.

I couldn't help but think of the countless cities and people who were safe, but not the capital.

The white palace of Arnaria, carved out of a mountain, was also intact.

The landscape of Arnaka hasn't changed much, except for the walls and turrets that surround the outskirts of the city.

The only thing that has changed is the depression and despair you can see in the faces of the people on the streets.

No one was talking about it.

Arnaka had become a deserted city with an unearthly air of desolation.

Sometimes, he said, he watched children play from the tall spires of Arnaria.

But I couldn't find them, even after washing my eyes and looking for them.

Herriot had nothing to do with what happened at Gate.

But he walked with me with a guilty look on his face, as if everything was his responsibility.

Herriot's longed-for hometown had become a city of silence.

-pot!

We saw a flash of light in the distance, in the center of the city.

The place where the warp gate is believed to have once been.

In what was presumably now a warp spot, there was a flash of light and a group of them appeared.

Herriot's eyes widened.

"Ah....... Dad......."

Archduke Saint-Antoine and his band of mages appeared through the warp spot.

When the Archduke and his band of mages arrived at the warp spot, the people in the area didn't just turn their heads at the sight of the Archduke, they scurried away.

As if you've seen something unholy.

As he was accustomed to in such situations, the Archduke merely led the mages in the direction of the White Palace.

We saw citizens fleeing from the sight of the Archduke and his band of mages, people shutting their windows as soon as they saw him.

No one was openly cursing.

However, the vibe that everyone perceived the Archduke as something to be avoided was readily apparent.

The stillness and silence of Arnaka.

I couldn't help but wonder why.

A princess on the side of the devil.

For now, Arnaka is safe, but he knows that once this is over, the Duchy of St. Thuan will face imperial retribution.

He knows the future of the Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan, the Duchy of Saint-Thuan, and Arnaka.

Still, she can't leave Arnaka because it's not safe outside.

Therefore, when he sees the Grand Duke of Saint-Antoine, he turns away as if he were facing the image of death.

Knowing that turning away from the Archduke would not escape the dark fate that befell the Duchy of St. Thuan. As if turning his back on the Grand Duke could in and of itself absolve him later.

"Dad......."

Herriot squeezed his eyes shut as he looked at his father, the king who was being shunned.

Tears were silently falling from his closed eyes.

\* \* \*

I wasn't expecting glory from Arnaka.

Technically, Arnaka was in a much better situation than the other cities.

Turrets guard the city, and the overcrowding hasn't pushed the city's ability to support itself past a critical mass.

But everyone knew that the princess would pay for her sins.

Hence the gloom that pervaded the city.

Herriot and I were at the White Palace, with Arnaria visible in the distance.

A city where people aren't crazy with hate and anger, but where you can read nothing but despair and depression on everyone's face.

That was Arnaka's current state.

"If you want to go see it, do it."

"......."

The guards that protect Arnaria are not human.

They are all magically created golems.

So if Herriot wants to meet the Archduke, he can.

Herriot knows the whole story.

I realize that the gate didn't happen because of my will.

But the reality is that your choices may cost everyone in Arnaka.

"Do I....... deserve......?"

So Herriot couldn't help but feel guilty.

If I tell people that I didn't cause the gate to happen, they won't believe me.

So if humanity's retribution comes to Arnaka, Herriot can only blame himself.

The country and its citizens should be held accountable for the princess who betrayed humanity, not the princess.

In that position, Harriet can't help but think that she doesn't deserve to see her father.

From the father's mouth, you might hear a reprimand for a daughter who made a stupid choice.

He may think that his father will grab him and not let go.

You may think you're going to hear all kinds of hateful and angry words from your family.

"You know that just because I call you a dick, doesn't mean I think you're stupid."

"......."

"The Archduke Saint-Thuan I saw was a man who should be called a daughter fool."

In fact, my first impression of the Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan was that he was an idiot.

"Just like you're not an idiot, your father isn't really an idiot."

I put my hand to Harriet's face under her robe.

"As wise as you are, your father, the Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan, must be a wise man."

"......."

"I'm sure you've tried to understand why you had to do it, and I'm sure you've gotten some answers."

Just as Herriot is wise, I suspect the Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan is a wise man.

Herriot de Saint-Etienne wasn't born for nothing.

"After all, a parent can only trust their child so much."

Just as it's common for parents to hate their children, it's also common for parents to have no choice but to trust their children at certain crucial moments in their lives.

You'd think that some decisive choice by the child would be inevitable.

The Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan would not be a fool.

"So, go ahead."

That's why I don't think Archduke Saint-Antoine will grab Herriot and let him go.

Harriet stares at the hand I put to her cheek.

"Yeah....... I'll go check it out."

What courage my words have given you.

"And I'll be back."

I've come this far, and I can't leave the city only to see despair.

You're faced with a huge responsibility.

I guess I can take the joy and sadness of the reunion with me.

\* \* \*

The Grand Duchess who disappeared with the Demon has returned.

But there was no uproar.

Arnaria's security system was controlled by the Grand Duchy, and very few people used Arnaria.

What was reported by the golem was not known to the vassals, and only members of the Grand Duchess's family were aware of the visit of the missing Grand Duchess.

Quietly entering the palace, the Grand Duchess was able to face her family for the first time in a very long time.

The returning Grand Duchess could only be a sinner.

Contrary to Herriot's fears, the three older siblings, including the Grand Duchess de Saint-Antoine, said nothing and did not criticize the youngest for bringing so much pressure on the family.

It was just a tearful reunion.

Despite the lengthy conversation, neither Herriot nor any other member of the Grand Duchy would say a word about the demon.

They didn't ask where I was or how I was doing.

As if just being okay is enough in itself.

Mother and three older brothers.

It's not enough, but when he's done talking, Herriot enters the Archduke's study for the last time.

There, with an indelible look of weariness on his face, was the Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan.

The way the Archduke looked at her, always stern but always gentle, sometimes trying to control her by force, was very different from the way he used to look at her.

"Sit down."

Her words were far too casual for a reunion after so many years, and she sat back in her chair, her expression stony.

The important stories always came from my father's mouth.

Getting yelled at for doing something wrong.

Or to go to the temple.

Or to quit temple.

It all came out of the Archduke's mouth.

There was never a word of reproach or criticism from the family, because everyone knew that was the role of the Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan.

Her mother and brothers never talked to her about it, because everyone knows that's the role of the head of the household.

For Herriot, his father was a nuisance.

Make yourself pretty to the point of annoyance.

Worried to the point of annoyance.

I hated myself enough to be annoying.

But now, having made a choice that could lead to her family's destruction, Harriet has come to face her father, the patriarch, as a sinner.

An ugly daughter, determined to destroy the long-standing Saint-Thuan family.

Encouraged by Reinhard's words, I returned to Arnaria.

My family, who I hadn't seen in a long time, were happy to hear that I was safe.

But now, Herriot felt like he was on trial.

I felt like I was being told in detail what my sins were and that I would have to pay for them.

So now.

Herriot de Saint-Etienne, for the first time in his life.

I was afraid of my father's stern expression.

I'm glad to be alive.

Welcome back.

I was afraid of my father, who would tell me to sit down in a chair, as if I were standing in a court of law, without telling me any of that.

Herriot sits across from the Archduke, his face set and his eyes desperate.

I felt like I was going to burst into tears.

His father was always hugging him and bothering him.

But why don't you hug me in this situation?

I'm sorry.

I know I'm in the wrong, but I know I'm in the wrong big time.

I'm not going to bother you anymore, so why don't you just give me a hug.

That's what I wanted to say, but I couldn't get the words out.

"You've come full circle?"

At the Archduke's question, Herriot shook his head.

I have to leave soon. And as much as I wanted to come back, I couldn't.

The Archduke nodded, understanding.

"Do you know what you have chosen?"

"......."

The Archduke stares at Herriot in silence.

"If this does not end, humanity will perish, and the House of Saint-Thuan and the Duchy will be finished."

"If this is finalized, the wrath of the Empire will be directed at our family, and it will be the end of the House of Saint-Thuan and the Duchy."

"Daughter."

"Let me ask you a question."

"Was it the kind of choice that you wouldn't regret if it happened."

The deaths of countless people.

The end of the family name.

Is it a choice you won't regret if it happens?

At Gaju's question, the youngest stares into his father's eyes.

It wasn't a scolding and reprimand.

Where you've been and what you've been doing.

Why on earth did you make that choice.

That wasn't the question.

As a member of a family, as a person.

The question was, will you regret the decision you made?

Herriot thinks back two years.

I trusted Reinhardt, so it was a decision and a choice. I didn't even know what was going on at the time of the Gate incident.

But now, she knows the whole truth.

Why Gate happened, what Akasha is, and what people's misconceptions are.

What the devil is really like.

I know it all now.

But, regret.

He asked about regrets.

If your decisions destroyed your hometown and killed all your family.

Herriot gritted his teeth and narrowed his eyes.

"I regret....... I think I'll do......."

"......."

You won't regret it.

A tear slips from Herriot's closed eye.

"Still....... Still....... Dad....... Me....... You know......."

"What if....... If I could go back to that day two years ago and say....... Even if I knew it would happen....... Even if I knew everything would end up like this....... Even if I knew....... Even if I knew......."

"I....... the same....... I think I'll do......."

You'll regret it.

If the Duchy of St. Thuan falls, and everyone in your family dies.

I think we should help Reinhardt.

You'll regret it, but you'll make this choice again and again.

Clearly, I wasn't accomplishing anything.

Not just to help Reinhardt, but because he could have saved a lot of people.

I know now that I didn't make the wrong choice.

It's not that I don't regret it, it's that I would do it all over again even though I know I would regret it.

Hearing this, the Archduke looked at his weeping daughter and nodded.

"Daughter, you are the most gifted child in the long history of the Saint-Thuan family."

"......."

"Therefore, you must be the wisest descendant in the history of your family."

The Archduke rose from his seat, walked to his sobbing daughter's side, and laid his hand on her head as she stilled her sobs.

"So your decision is right. This father believes."

"Ugh....... black......."

"Now let's hold you, my little girl."

And then she was in the arms of the father she hated so much.

Episode 465.

When he returned, Herriot was much more relaxed.

I could tell by the look on his face that he had finished his story.

"I could stay for a few days."

"No, it's okay, I'll be in trouble if they realize I'm back, so I'd better get going."

We don't know what they talked about, but we do know that the Archduke and his family understood Herriot.

The fortunes of the Duchy of St. Thuan are uncertain. It has failed to defend all of its cities outside of the capital.

So if we just move the people in this city, we'll be fine.

Arnaka is a finished city, and they don't know if they'll be able to make a life for themselves in Edina.

But if they can relocate to Edina, they may be able to escape the wrath of humanity that will one day befall them.

"I'm not sure how the Archduke would feel about that, but we could move all the people of Arnaka to Edina."

Her eyes widened at my words.

"But....... work?"

"The problem is that we don't have a way to do it right now, but it's something we could do if we had a way."

If you have a warp gate, you can make large-scale moves, but warp gates are currently disabled.

Physical travel is also impossible. No matter how skilled a wizard the Archduke was, there was no way he could lead an entire nation from the Duchy of St. Thuan in the northwest of the continent to Fort Mokna in the southernmost part of the continent.

Teleporting entire populations is obviously not an option, so it's out of the question.

"Nothing is going to happen to Arnaka right away, so let's figure out how to do it later."

"......Yes. Okay."

They have enough on their plate just dealing with the Gate situation. So it's unlikely that anything will happen to the Duchy of Saint-Ouen or the Grand Duke right away.

Relocating the people of the Duchy of Saint-Thuan to Edina after the Gate debacle.

I could almost feel the last shade of color drain from Herriot's face at my words.

\* \* \*

Reunited with her family after so many years, with a good story to tell, and with the idea that she might be able to save the people of Arnaka, Harriet was more energized than ever.

Back in Edina, Herriot's face was much brighter.

"After the gate debacle is over, I wonder if we can improve the warp gate even further than it already is and create a gate that directly connects Arnaka to the Edina Archipelago?"

"I wish I could do that, but....... No, I'm sure you can do it."

"Yeah, let's make sure it doesn't."

Needless to say, it's nice to see them so energized.

He didn't seem to be depressed or struggling, he just didn't show it like everyone else did.

I couldn't help but be cheered up by his newfound vigor.

I never thought that Heriot's work on the warp gate at my request would come in handy in this way, but as it turns out, his research may be the way to save his people back home.

This would be after the destruction of the warp gates across the continent, but Herriot had begun to prepare a blueprint for what was to come.

Of course, it just meant more work for her to do, which made her already busy life even busier, but at the end of the day, she was saving people, even her family, so why not?

It made sense for her to get serious about it, as it would release the guilt and self-blame she'd been hiding for two years.

It was only natural for me to continue doing what I had to do, with Herriot being Herriot and me being me.

\* \* \*

It's been about a month since I've been to Arnaka.

The complete end of the Gate debacle was only going to get longer and longer.

This is because the warp gates were unleashing increasingly stronger monsters as a unit, as well as stronger defenses, so we had to be increasingly cautious about destroying them one by one.

Eleris was no longer able to destroy the Warp Gates on her own, and it was no wonder that the Empire was finding it increasingly difficult for Savior Tana's forces to destroy them.

As the number of warp gates decreases, the remaining warp gates are destroyed at a slower rate, causing more casualties.

With the end of the world so close, yet so far away, things are starting to happen that are independent of the Gate incident.

"Great One. I have word that the Empress is about to be executed."

"......."

And I was forced to face what was bound to come at some point.

"Why?"

Bertus hasn't answered the crowd's demands so far, so I'm assuming he has enough willpower to protect Charlotte.

"Is it because of the last time I showed up on the ecliptic?"

If the crowd's anxiety has exploded and I can no longer ignore their demands, then I'm the one who started it all.

At my words, Antirrhinus smiled wryly.

"I can't say that's the cause, but it's not the crowds that matter, it's the demands of the imperial powers and the Five Great Houses that seem to be irresistible."

"......."

"They are demanding that the empress be used as a scapegoat to stabilize the country."

The unstable empire is also faced with the demands of the vassal states and the pressures of the Five Great Houses.

The Principalities are the most important members of the Empire, and the Five Great Houses are a powerful force to be reckoned with, even if their support among the populace has waned. The Empire cannot afford to ignore them.

They act like the gate is already closed when it's not.

The Five Great Houses want to dilute the hatred against them by pointing the finger of blame at the Empress, while the Imperial Houses want to eliminate the destabilizing factor of the Empress to confirm their allegiance to the crumbling empire.

So I reluctantly said yes.

"So Emperor Bertus decided to execute her three weeks later, at noon on a Sunday, in the Great Square of the Zodiac."

"......."

Bertus eventually had to make the choice to trade the empire for Charlotte.

But Antirrhinus was still smiling.

"And to top it all off, we've decided to execute the Lord Vampire and Lord Sarkegar together."

"......what?"

"It's exactly what you heard."

No.

Charlotte is one thing, but executing them together?

Did Bertus forget my warning after two years?

Don't you realize that if you mess with Rusinil and Sarkegar, I'll be your enemy?

Antirrhinus was still chuckling, as if he found the situation too amusing.

Because of that unnervingly amused expression, I realized what this embarrassing and unpleasant situation meant.

Three weeks.

That's a long time.

It's a laid-back time, maybe too laid-back.

Bertus will know that I appeared on the ecliptic not long ago.

Soon, you'll intuit that I'm looking at the ecliptic from wherever I am.

I'm not trying to kill Charlotte.

Rusinil and Sarkegar hang on.

That fact speaks volumes.

It's not a rush, but rather an execution with quite a bit of grace.

To spread the word.

"I'll give you two, and you're asking me to take Charlotte."

It would mean that I would show up on the spot and take the three of them away somehow.

The crowd wants Charlotte to be judged somehow, so I can't sneak her to them, and even if I did, the Empire wouldn't know where I was.

So just as you're about to judge Charlotte in public, the devil takes over.

As an empire, it's a good picture to excuse a lot of things.

I tried to do as you asked, but the devil appeared.

Eventually, Bertus can no longer protect Charlotte.

So I'll give you two of my men back, but please take Charlotte with you," was Bertus's way of saying.

"Really....... way of doing things that is so bizarre and mind-blowing......."

It communicates its will to me in this way without knowing where I am.

I was in awe.

I wonder if my unintentional appearance on the ecliptic will be the catalyst that will eventually bring Charlotte back, as well as Sarkegar and Lucinil.

Three weeks later, at noon on a Sunday.

They've never coordinated with each other, but they need to stage a staged kidnapping.

\* \* \*

At this point, there's one thing Reinhardt doesn't know.

"Three weeks from now, it's Sunday, brother."

"......."

Charlotte nodded, sitting up in bed with a dark look on her face.

Bertus didn't fail to hold on.

Charlotte wanted it for herself.

Your existence is a burden to humanity and the empire, and if your life, even if it's a waste, can bring even the slightest relief to the people, then so be it.

If you force me to live, the empire will fall.

This was happening because Charlotte had asked for her own execution, in addition to the demands of the Emperor and the Five Great Patriarchs.

Bertus rightly refused.

No way.

That's not going to happen.

The words that came out of my brother's mouth for the first time in a very long time were kill me.

Kill me and prolong the life of the Empire. If your very existence is the cause of division, you must do something about it, even in death.

And since she actually caused all of this to happen, she realized that since she can't go out and fight like Ellen, she should do something like this.

As it is, it's already dividing empires in real time, so it might as well be dead.

Give up.

Give up.

Regret.

Beyond all of that, Charlotte was at a point where she hated herself and had no attachment to life.

Bertus didn't make this decision because he was tired of the crowds, the empire, and the demands of the Great Patriarch.

If I don't execute him, he'll kill himself in the Palace of Spring.

So this was the only way I could squeeze it out somehow.

Bertus didn't say anything to Charlotte.

That Reinhardt appeared on the ecliptic.

That Reinhardt is watching from somewhere in the ecliptic.

That they still want to protect people.

It didn't tell me anything about that.

I didn't say anything, knowing that it would only add to Charlotte's self-loathing.

So this is Bertus's dogma.

All Charlotte knows is that in three weeks, she will be burned at the stake in the public square, alone.

That's why I didn't say who might come.

Charlotte doesn't even know who's hanging with her.

I didn't say anything like that. Charlotte would never allow that to happen to her.

They'll think it's unforgivable, and if I tell them Reinhardt is coming to save them, they'll strangle themselves.

If Reinhardt doesn't show up on time three weeks later, it's okay.

Bertus will save Charlotte, even if it means killing himself.

It will no longer be able to return to the ecliptic, but it will be able to live quietly somewhere.

We don't know how to make a brother who has given up on life live again.

The only thing you can do is make sure that Charlotte is life-affirming and doesn't die.

That was it.

Only Reinhardt can keep Charlotte alive.

Thus, Bertus is speaking to an invisible Reinhardt.

Please.

Let Charlotte live another day.

I know it's unreasonable to ask, but please forgive Charlotte.

You can't forgive me, but you can forgive Charlotte.

In effect, it was the emperor begging the devil.

The Empire can't protect Charlotte, so the Devil does.

"Brother."

"......."

Charlotte doesn't think she deserves to be forgiven, so if you tell her your plan, she will reject it.

So, I had no intention of telling Charlotte this story.

Approaching the silent Charlotte, Bertus pulled up a chair and sat down.

All of this devastation, even if it wasn't caused by her failure to believe in the Devil, was enough to send Charlotte into a spiral of self-pity that she couldn't escape.

She can't bear to think of herself forgiven by Reinhardt, safe and protected by him.

Bertus stares at his brother, now in the form of a demon. Charlotte's red eyes stare back at him.

If Reinhardt takes Charlotte, she will be protected by the Devil from then on, if indeed Reinhardt shows up.

Because Bertus can't protect Charlotte.

You don't know where the devil is, and he won't tell you.

So, this will be the last time Bertus sees Charlotte for three weeks.

They hated each other to the point of wanting to kill each other, and how many times they actually tried to kill each other.

I don't know how long this has been the case.

At some point, however, as he watched Charlotte become too weak to be considered a competitor, Bertus changed his mind.

Competitors that aren't worth dealing with.

In a losing contender.

When my misconceptions about the Devil were not cleared up, I saw him as a poor brother who had been used by Reinhardt from the beginning.

And now, it's impossible to control myself.

He had brought the world to this state, and he was so buried in the words of his own curses to the devil that he could do nothing but feel guilty, blame himself, and beat himself up.

The First Emperor is dead, and Bertus has taken over.

Ever since, Bertus has wanted to protect Charlotte at all costs.

Ever since the world hated Charlotte, Bertus has been fighting to protect her.

Even as the crowd, as well as numerous ministers, poured out their suspicions about Charlotte's ties to the Devil, Bertus ignored them all.

Somehow, he hoped his pathetic brother would survive.

And now, Bertus is going to let the devil do what he can't.

Charlotte's red eyes look to Bertus, who looks to himself.

Last but not least.

Because it's the last one.

"Brother......."

"......."

"Can I hold you?"

At Bertus' words, Charlotte's eyes widened in slight surprise.

Bertus smiled bitterly, seeing in the always dead eyes a trace of something that had long since returned: emotion.

Just like Bertus did.

During this terrible time, Charlotte saw the brother she hated so much trying to protect her.

Only after everything is broken.

Only after you've ruined everything with your own hands.

It's no wonder that a brotherhood was created between them that didn't and couldn't exist.

Charlotte doesn't know what's about to happen.

Therefore, he believes that Bertus is only doing this because he is sorry that he made the decision to kill him, even if it was at his request.

Charlotte is choosing her own death.

Sorry.

Charlotte hesitates, looking at Bertus, who says it guiltily.

You will die.

Charlotte hesitated for a moment, then slowly leaned toward Bertus.

Bertus pulled the small, slender head of Charlotte to his chest and held her close.

This was all new to me.

Oh, how small it was.

Bertus thinks to himself as he embraces his brother for the first time.

"Gotta go somewhere nice....... I have to go to a good place......."

"......."

Bertus could only say that, for fear that if he were to be specific, his emaciated but brilliant brother might recognize what he was talking about.

Therefore, Charlotte began to cry a little while being held by Bertus.

A good place to start.

Is it okay to allow yourself to be in that place?

I'm dead, and if I die, I'll have to burn in the fires of hell for bringing this on the world.

Is it possible to die and go to a good place?

Charlotte cries a little in her brother's arms, thinking she must not be able to go.

"......."

If Reinhardt comes.

So, if you take Charlotte.

Life with the Devil is better than life in this springtime palace, at least.

She would be forgiven by Reinhardt, and though she would still feel self-pity and bitterness, it would be a better life than the one she had now, locked in her dark bedroom, doing nothing.

You're going to have less and less to say, and you're going to be looking for something to do.

And so, out of Bertus' sight, she would live a better life than the one she had now.

What you can't do, Reinhardt can do for you.

Now that he is Emperor, Bertus must take responsibility for what he has done.

Unable to become emperor, Charlotte will live under the protection of the devil, for she has no responsibilities.

That's where Reinhardt comes in.

It will come, Bertus believes.

I only trust Reinhardt after all the things that happened because I didn't trust him when I needed him most.

I know this is a terrible thing to do.

I know I'm being horribly hard on Reinhardt.

It's the only way to do it.

Bertus couldn't think of anything else but this choice.

"Sorry....... Sorry brother......."

In Bertus' apology.

In that first embrace, Charlotte shook her head, realizing that death, not survival, awaited her.

"No......."

Charlotte struggles to speak, her voice cracking.

"If I....... I'm more sorry......."

I could have said something like that.

"So far....... really, really....... thank you."

And not just being held, but moving his slender arms to hug his sibling face to face.

I was able to.

Episode 466.

The execution of the Empress would solve quite a few problems for the Empire.

The first is to temporarily defuse the anger of the scapegoating crowd.

The execution of the Empress deflects the angry attention that has been directed at the Five Great Patriarchs, thereby diverting negative attention away from the Five Great Patriarchs.

The imperial powers that don't know the truth also distrust the empire because they see the empire wrapped around a demon-cursed princess, so they can be relieved of that distrust as well.

Crucially, this resolves any suspicions that the Imperial Family may have been involved with the Devil due to the circling of the Empress so far.

The execution of Charlotte de Gradias may not have solved anything physically, but it did solve a political problem.

Of course, that's only a stopgap measure.

In the end, the problems would fester again, only temporarily sealed, because the demon that represented the hatred was not gone.

After all, even if the Empire actually executes the Empress, it's only buying time.

It may be that the division and fall of empires is predestined, only postponed indefinitely.

In the Empire, the Emperor is the only one who knows the true intentions behind this.

People are excited about the idea of executing two of the devil's henchmen together, but they have no idea what the real intentions are.

However, there are a few people who can guess what the emperor is really up to without him saying it.

"Do you think ...... Reinhardt will come?"

"Right."

Ellen found nothing to say to Bertus's words.

Reinhardt will or won't come.

It's coming, it's bound to come.

Ellen thinks so.

But I know it's going to happen, so I'm wondering if it's right to use Reinhardt.

The same people who didn't believe in Reinhardt now believe in Reinhardt, so it's shamelessly exploitative.

Even though it wasn't her job, Ellen couldn't put the question out of her mind.

Reinhardt will come.

This time, as always, he will try to save Charlotte.

I envy you that.

"......."

I know it's unreasonable to hope for that.

Ellen couldn't get the thought out of her head.

\* \* \*

Bertus created the opportunity to get Charlotte, not me.

Plus, unexpectedly, we had the chance to get Rusinil and Sarkegar back as well.

If you take Charlotte with you, you'll eventually have to show yourself in this situation.

It's a risk I'm taking, and when I execute an important person, I may end up having to deal with a loss of trust in the empire for losing that person to the devil.

Bertus is willing to risk it on his own terms, and I am willing to risk it on my own terms to save the Empress, Lucinil, and Sarkegar from the heart of the Empire.

Three weeks later, on a Sunday.

Needless to say, the best of the Empire are scrambling to resolve the Gate situation.

So the overflowing crowds at the execution grounds and the troops guarding the massive firing squad didn't seem all that sophisticated.

Obviously, they've intentionally set up a lax security system.

It's a ridiculous play.

The Emperor does this to get the Empress to run away from the Empire, and the Devil agrees to it.

It's funny how Bertus and I came to this agreement without ever speaking to each other.

-Waaaahhhhh!

However, the crowd was screaming with excitement at the news that the empire was finally executing the empress.

It was so different from the imperial landscape I'd seen just a few days earlier.

The color of the people's faces remained the same, but everyone was in a frenzy. As if the death of the Empress would change anything.

What would they think if the Empress was kidnapped by me?

Charlotte is, after all, a poor innocent, clueless maiden who is kidnapped twice by the Devil.

Or maybe they'll remember you as an ally of the devil who was so important that the devil had to come save you in the end.

What would Charlotte think of me now?

I don't know.

However, I do what I have to do.

As always.

Bertus would not be defending much, allowing me to take Charlotte, Lucinil, and Sarkegar.

If you're doing a staged kidnapping and the best of the best are leading the execution, you're going to have people who are forced to fight and actually die. That's a comedy of errors.

I'll burst through the death row attendants and guards, give them a good beating, and disappear via mass teleport.

Because you don't need to see blood.

I might kill a few people to show that I'm a demon, to unite humanity in fear of me, but I still don't feel compelled to kill people.

It's not something that requires a large army anyway.

I brought Antrianus and Herriot with me.

Riana, with her hatred of the Empire, is not cut out for this, and neither is Olivia.

-Kill! Kill the Empress!

The three of us watched from a distance as the crowd roared.

A huge crowd had been stirred into madness and was shouting for the death of the Empress.

Looks like.

Three beings hanging from a pole, tied to a pole above a mountain of firewood piled beneath their feet.

To my left was a silver-haired girl, Lucinil.

To his right was Sarkegar, a demonic figure with blackened wings, chained.

And the center.

Charlotte was tied up, her hair graying, her head shaking helplessly.

Sarkeghar did the same, but the thick black mist that flowed from her body made everyone realize that she had become something very sinister.

Look at that.

The Empress is cursed.

It wasn't the princess who returned from the demon castle in the first place, it was the devil disguised as a princess, and he's only now revealed his true colors.

I could hear people crying out.

We don't know if Sarkegar and Rusinil are aware of the situation or not.

Charlotte, however, hung her head in defeat.

It's not about being afraid of people's hatred of themselves.

It was like he was afraid to look people in the eye.

I get those three.

It's easy.

Just make your way through the crowd, split that pole, and use mass teleport to get out of here.

Such.

It's that simple.

Just when you think you're about to enter, looking at the crowd in the distance.

"There's a problem."

Herriot grabbed the hem of my robe.

"Problem......?"

As if the problem wasn't bad enough, Herriot's complexion was white inside his robes.

"The spatial coordinates across this square are all out of whack."

"What? What does that mean?"

Similarly, Antirrhinus, in his robes, smiled coyly at me.

"Great One, it means that throughout this great plaza, a bond has been formed that blocks spatial travel."

"......what?"

What the hell is this.......

What the hell are you talking about?

If there's a spatial teleportation shield all over the place, you don't have the option of breaking through, taking out those three, and then running straight to the mass teleportation scroll.

You have to break through this crowd somehow.

What the hell was Bertus doing defending this?

Did Bertus really want to kill Charlotte?

There's no way that could happen.

Antirrhinus begins to chuckle.

"Hehe....... It's not like we're the only ones who've been thinking about this in our overstretched time....... we weren't the only ones."

Other forces.

"Isn't it possible that there were others who had a premonition that the devil was going to show up here?"

The wrong people got involved in this situation.

"Great One, what would you do?"

Antirrhinus laughs.

By the time he told me this story, Antony had already intuited that this was going to happen.

He didn't tell me on purpose.

"This....... crazy old man......."

As if he had been complimented, Antirrhinus only laughed harder.

\* \* \*

The emperor did not go to the execution chamber.

The view was magnified from a tall spire on the imperial palace wall.

There was no reason for him to perform the execution himself, and he couldn't bring himself to face Reinhardt there.

From afar, watching Reinhardt save Charlotte was the only thing Bertus could do.

The shouts of anger and hatred from the people in the great square reached Bertus's ears.

Oh, how I hate you.

Why do you hate it so much.

Why.

Bertus watched the spectacle with gritted teeth.

Waiting for Reinhardt to show up.

If it doesn't show up, wait for the next plan to run.

"Your Majesty, there seems to be a problem."

"What do you mean ...... problem?"

"We don't know who set it up, but a spatial shift shield has formed around the entire perimeter of the Great Square."

"......what?"

Bertus's complexion turned an earthy color at the words of the imperial mage at his side.

Reinhardt's thoughts and Bertus' weren't all that different.

Bertus knows that Reinhardt has a number of wizards of very high caliber.

So I was thinking that it was just a matter of getting in there and teleporting away.

It was one of those things where Reinhardt would just show up and everything would be fine.

There was no need for a big fight, no conflict, and I was confident that Reinhard would not cause a massacre.

However, the teleportation shield means that even if Reinhardt shows up, he'll have to fight his way through the crowd to the outside of the shield to escape.

If Reinhardt tried to break through that crowd by force, there would be a massacre of epic proportions.

Bertus knows Reinhardt wouldn't want that.

"What kind of asshole would......."

"I'm sorry, Your Majesty, but from this distance I can't tell who installed it and with what intent."

Too far away.

Reinhard would never do that, and Bertus would never tell him to do that.

So this means that other forces have intervened.

"Some bastards....... have realized that the demon is coming here......."

As it turns out, Charlotte and two of the demon's henchmen were actually bait to lure the demon to the execution site.

"Are you trying to kill the demon....... Are you trying to kill Reinhardt......?"

The teleportation shields were meant to kill the demon before it had a chance to escape.

As Bertus realized, if Reinhardt was really here, he was bound to notice the situation.

It wasn't a trap you set, but it ended up being a trap.

We don't know what they are, but we do know that when they show up, the attack will begin.

Reinhardt would be wise to step aside, and rightly so, as his opponent would be fully prepared.

Bertus gritted his teeth.

Only a few people know that this execution today is an attempt by the emperor to lure the devil into taking the princess.

Of course, the executioners don't know the intent.

If Reinhardt steps down, the execution will be carried out as scheduled.

Even if they didn't perish in the flames of the pyre, the executioners would somehow snuff out the life out of the demon's two minions and the princess.

Reinhardt steps forward, and Reinhardt is attacked.

However, when Reinhard retreats, the demon's two minions and Charlotte die.

"What the hell....... What assholes......."

Bertus narrowed his eyes, watching the rage and madness boiling in the great hall.

\* \* \*

-Waaaahhhhh!

-Kill! Kill!

-Kill the dirty demons!

In my madness and rage, I stared at Antirrhinus. Harriet could only bite her lip, her complexion white.

"You knew this was going to happen, right?"

"How can you tamper with the future, Great One?"

"Isn't it true that if you knew this was going to happen, you wouldn't have told me?"

"Of course you do."

They don't even try to hide their maliciousness.

What I thought was a simple problem was actually a stark choice between two terrible options.

Do you run in there, save Charlotte, break through the crowd and escape, knowing that the ambush is coming?

Or watch Charlotte, Lucinil, and Sarkegar die.

Antony loves it when I get thrown into situations like this.

That monster will be happy with any choice I make.

You will be pleased to see me, who made the first choice, dying of foolish attachment.

I'll be happy if my first choice succeeds in rescuing the three of them.

You will enjoy making the second choice, and watching me despair at the reality of having to trade my survival for the lives of those three.

He enjoys pushing me to the edge because he gets a kick out of whatever I do.

Antony didn't tell me anything I hadn't already thought of.

It would be fun if I didn't know that.

-Wow!

To the roar of an angry crowd, the execution is about to take place.

I wonder if I'll die if I go in.

To save Charlotte and me, what would happen to the Edina Archipelago if I, the Archdemon, died?

Without Archdemons, the ruling system of the Edina Archipelago would be untenable.

No, it would be a matter of dying with them like a fool without saving the three of them.

I don't know who's going to attack me.

I haven't even reached mastery yet.

So, no, you shouldn't.

I know.

I shouldn't save them.

My life and the lives of so many others depend on it.

We're putting tens of millions of lives on the scales to save just three.

Even if you can actually save the three of them, you shouldn't risk your own life on something like this.

A monarch is one who commands, not one who wields a sword.

This is reckless.

But.

If you didn't do reckless things because they were reckless, if you lived that way.

I wouldn't have told my seniors.

I wouldn't have dueled with you.

From there, and after many other reckless endeavors, the feat of eventually ascending to the throne would not have been mine.

I wouldn't have had the countless relationships I had, and I wouldn't have had the relationships I had to lose.

I wouldn't have had a relationship I wanted back.

You're right about not doing anything reckless.

I stand on a mountain built by recklessness.

I wonder if the idea that I shouldn't do something because it's reckless is just a picture of me settling for what I've now built with recklessness.

That's cowardice.

That's just defeatism.

I was reckless, and that recklessness alone made me who I am today.

You can't just say "no" to this because it's too reckless.

A monarch is not supposed to do this.

A monarch has too much on his plate to risk his life for something like this.

Throw away what you can.

Take what you can take.

It should be.

But.

I.

Not once.

I never thought I was fit for a monarch.

I didn't do anything because I could.

I did it because I had to.

I've been doing it because I think I should.

I never thought that anything could be done.

I didn't do everything because I thought it was possible.

-Waaaahhhhh!

"I'm going alone."

Looking out at the angry crowd.

I take a step.

"Herriot, neutralize this spatial movement interference."

"Yeah....... I'll try."

"Antrianus, provide ranged support."

"Yes, Great One."

Charlotte De Gradias.

Sarkegar.

Lucinyl.

I save you today.

Again.

Continued next.

Always.

I, I will save you.

That, my lord, is the way I go.

Episode 467.

Ellen Artorius was also watching.

You face the situation with your fists balled into fists, wearing robes that hide your face in case people recognize you.

What she didn't realize was that there was a spatial travel shield around her.

Ellen has only one thing on her mind.

Will Reinhardt really show up?

I had no intention of stealthing if they showed up.

I don't have the right to ask to be taken away. Nor should I.

Ellen knew she was carrying too much and couldn't abandon her people.

Knowing that his disappearance was already a great sin in and of itself, beyond his guilt over Reinhardt, it was already a choice he had no choice but to make.

I just wanted to be able to see it, even from a distance.

Because that's good.

Because that's enough.

Hopefully no one gets hurt in the process.

So, while I was terrified of the madness of the crowd, I stood still and watched the execution.

Charlotte kept her head down, waiting for her death to come.

Charlotte doesn't know anything.

I don't know what's going to happen from here, I don't know anything.

If you find yourself hanging there.

Reinhardt does the same thing.

You can't make that choice when you've become the hope of humanity, but you can delude yourself.

I mean, you can think about it.

Ellen watched Charlotte silently from afar. If Reinhardt comes, Charlotte will be saved, she will be forgiven.

Amid the deafening roar, the executioners slowly prepare for the execution.

In fact, setting fires is more of a show.

None of them deserve to die in the flames of a wood burner.

He would be stabbed with a spear, decapitated with an axe, and so on.

But if Reinhardt shows up, that won't happen.

Those three will be rescued.

The executioners' torches were pointed at the three piles of wood, and flames began to rise with terrifying speed.

-Waaaahhhhhhh!

-Kill! Kill!

-Kill the devil!

-Kill the demons!

Even as she thought her eardrums were tearing, Ellen could see.

Someone making their way through a crowd.

As they walked to the foot of the firing squad, lightly pushing past the crowd guarding it.

-Bang!

Kicking a pile of lit firewood as if to explode it with a single kick.

Just like that.

-Bang!

Kick the other three piles of firewood to pieces with a single stomp.

An unexpected presence.

The being removed its robes, revealing a young man with the appearance of a horned demon.

Even though it was her first time seeing it, Ellen could tell it was a Reinhardt.

"These three, by right, are mine to take back......."

The devil snaps his fingers.

"I'll take him."

-Currrrrr!

Suddenly, a fierce storm of flames erupted around the three poles.

The frozen executioners and surrounding guards jumped back at the sudden flames.

"Line....... Hart......."

-Ma'am, the devil!

-Demon!

-The king is here!

Naturally, the cheers turned to chaos with the arrival of a mysterious demon.

People who had previously hated the devil and the devil's forces begin to flee in terror when the devil actually appears.

And.

-Wednesday!

With a piercing, air-splitting sound, dozens of fireballs begin to rain down from the sky toward the flame barrier.

"What......?"

From the direction of the attack, it looked like it was aimed at the demon, not his minions.

-Koo-koo-koo-koo!

The hail of fireballs began to engulf the executioners and the vast crowd of people on the other side of the wall, as well as inside the wall.

Ellen watched the scene with her mouth open in disbelief.

A demon has appeared.

Then, as if someone had been waiting for that moment, they begin to attack the demon.

Like it doesn't matter how many people are in this place.

The crowds try to flee the sudden destruction.

People were tangling and falling over each other.

People trying to flee are quickly trampled over and crushed.

Then, Ellen looked.

-Kwachang!

-Bang!

Through the windows of the buildings around the Great Square, a number of mysterious black-robed figures, not fleeing, but rushing to the scene.

"What is this....... What the hell is......?"

-Currrrrr!

Ellen watched in disbelief as countless spells of destructive magic were cast beyond the flame barrier that held the demon, and civilians were swept away in its wake.

-Kurung!

In an instant, the barrier of flames dissipated, revealing Reinhardt inside.

Before he knew it, Reinhardt had rescued all three from the firing squad.

In the midst of the chaos, Ellen sees Reinhardt looking around at the fleeing crowd, the enchanted, and the unidentified raiders.

-Order....... It was you guys.

-Yes.

-We couldn't be friends forever.

Ellen doesn't know what you're talking about.

However.

Reinhardt hands the unconscious Charlotte over to Sarkegar.

-Lord and Sarkeghar should get out first, because their target is me, and they'll probably only want to kill me.

-ArkDemon, but.......

-Your Majesty, you can't do that.......

-Go, this is a command.

The demonic figure and the silver-haired girl, who had just been released from captivity, seem to be overwhelmed by the weight of the demon's words. They nod with a stoic expression and begin to move away from the attack.

Like you knew you couldn't avoid a fight.

Lightning rains down from the sky, and fireballs fall.

It's not just magic.

Sword and spear in hand, they charge at the demon, enveloped in blue energy.

We don't know who they are, but they don't look like they're any good.

"Stop."

However, Ellen could clearly see that one of the men who had lunged at Reinhardt's words had flinched, if not stopped, in his tracks.

-Zap!

Alsbringer slashed at the charger's throat. It was a fierce blow that shattered even his enchanted shields and the barriers that had been spread across his body.

A War God's Relic that strengthens the user the stronger the opponent and the more difficult it is to overcome.

Now was the time for the demon to maximize Alsbringer's abilities.

This is not a master class.

However, the massive barrage of offensive magic could not penetrate the barrier of magical energy that flowed like flames for two meters around the Demon King's body.

The horsepower output was overwhelming to behold.

And a lot of power.

-Scissors! Boom!

With his right hand, he sliced through the spearman's shaft, slicing his body from the waist down, and with his left fist, he slammed into the man who had just thrust his sword into him, the shockwave shattering his body.

Masterclasses don't maneuver their power that wildly.

It just spits out a ton of output as it is.

The unrefined destructive force it emanated was not allowing the demon to make a single attack.

Realizing that they can no longer penetrate the Demon with an unlimited charge, they break through the fleeing crowd and set their sights on the Demon.

The demon sees a large number of dead people.

Those who were seriously overcrowded had already been killed by the Black Order's magic by the thousands.

He was dying, not at the hands of the devil, but at the hands of those who would kill him.

"If you can kill me, I don't care what it takes."

The Black Order said nothing in response to the demon's blunt words.

"Yeah, there are a lot of things in the world you can't control."

"Like I can't help it."

"I guess you guys can't help it."

"I understand."

"I understand."

The demon walks slowly.

"So let's kill each other, people who can't help it."

The Demon King's eyes widen, and anger flashes across his face.

-Kurung!

The demon runs.

And the Black Order members stood in his way.

\* \* \*

EpinHauser saved my life against the will of the Black Order.

So I knew enough to know that the Order was no longer on my side, as Antony had warned.

But I didn't think they would try to kill me in this situation, even at the cost of a huge number of civilian casualties.

Black Order.

A group of people who don't know much, but will suffer evil for the sake of justice.

It's poetic, but it also made me realize that these people are a lot like me in the sense that I wonder what's so different about what I do.

The point is not to debate the goodness or badness of each other.

We can't help ourselves.

I have to save my people.

The Black Order seeks to eliminate me, the seed of a great conflict.

Their inevitabilities are colliding, and eventually someone has to die.

I can't die.

So, you have to kill it.

-Bam!

Alsbringer and his opponent's swords swung wildly as they clashed.

-Bam!

"!"

I reached out to grab my throat in a flurry of movement, but a chain appeared out of thin air and wrapped around my left arm.

Whether it was the other's magic or his own, a chain of enchantment grabbed my left arm and wouldn't let go.

He's shaken by my attack, and he stabs me in the nape of the neck.

-Carded!

The sword that hit the magic shield failed to dig into my neck.

"Suck!"

-Quack!

With a strong tug on my left arm, the magic chain was overcome by my strength and shattered into pieces.

Most of them specialize in melee, and most of them are capable of enchantments and even magic.

Melee specialists, wizards, and even mages.

Not surprisingly, the Black Order was also a bunch of crazed monsters.

Now that I was here, it was clear that they were going to kill me.

It wasn't just the ones who wanted to fight in close quarters, but also the ones who were sniping from a distance.

The plaza was still packed with people.

Many people tried to flee, but the crowds were too large to get away.

The number of people killed by the Black Order's magic would overwhelmingly outnumber those killed by their own.

They don't just have enchantments, they have master classes.

We already knew that the Black Order wasn't just a group of wizards because of Dr. Effinghauser's case.

They're watching me from afar, waiting to pounce when it matters most.

They'll send in their minions to create a war of attrition and then stab or slash me to death when I have a clear opening.

Attacking with an auror-impregnated weapon would be the surest attack of all.

Knowing they couldn't break through my magic barrier with destructive spells, they seemed to want to take a different approach.

-Quadruple!

Suddenly, vines sprouting from the earth begin to wrap around my limbs at breakneck speed.

And then, out of those vines, countless bugs crawl and cover my body.

Black Order.

A bunch of sobriety bastards.

It was a spell that was unpleasant to look at.

"Burn."

I don't know what these bugs are, but I'm not going to let them burrow into my body.

-Kurung!

Hwayo's flame glowed, pouring out fierce flames.

The tree trunks and bugs that had wrapped themselves around me turned to black ash and disappeared in a shovelful.

You don't have to kill them all.

All I need to do is escape the Great Square. I don't know what Antirrhinus is up to, but I know that Lucinil, Sarkegar, and Charlotte are safe, and I can leave.

There are eyes on me from all sides, and the Order is not at full strength right now.

I could clearly see him trying to gauge my power.

It's just watching to kill it when it has a clear chance.

The long-range support was solid.

-Quack! Kwazik!

I could see swarms of bats flying everywhere, taking shape here and there, tearing apart the mages who were firing ranged bombardments at me, turning them to blood and killing them.

Antirrhinus, that old man. I wonder if he had access to some sort of alter ego.

Fortunately, the mages attacking from a distance were distracted by Antirrhinus.

People were running away, but they were clearly watching.

So the Empire can't help me, and it shouldn't.

It should exit on its own.

Still, there's something odd about it.

I stare at them as they gauge the distance.

There are a few who are definitely masterminds, and a few who are archmages, but I'm not sure if there are any.

Antirrhinus was not going to be easily outmaneuvered by the wizards.

"But you guys, why is that all you can do?"

But why is this the only black order?

It's definitely a strong force, and there's a lot I can't handle alone.

But if their goal was to kill me, it would inevitably mean that the Black Order's power was concentrated here.

These are certainly not people to be trifled with.

It's a little too shabby for my imagined Black Order supremacy.

"You and the Empire weren't the only ones dealing with the Gate situation on your own."

Someone who's been watching me from afar walks by.

"That's it."

The Black Order made a single appearance in the original movie and was never mentioned again.

That said, they were probably dealing with the Gate debacle and the monster in the background of the story.

Two years after Gate.

The Black Order would have been fighting and battling to deal with the Gate situation themselves.

As it did, it naturally weakened.

As you continue to lose combatants.

It's power, sure, but it's all they've got to eliminate me, the most important seed of conflict.

The Black Order was waiting for me in a place I knew I was bound to come.

He walked toward me, and soon removed his hood to reveal his face.

Sure enough, it was an older man I had never seen before.

Since nothing is what it seems, I couldn't tell how old he really was.

He was a man of many years, but his graying hair made it hard to guess his age.

As he approached me, the other Black Order members who had been confronting me slowly began to back away.

That, to some extent, determined the status of the approaching man.

"Are you the head of the order?"

He stares at me and shakes his head.

"Well....... I don't think 'head' is the right word, since the Order is usually a meeting of the highest ranking members where everything is decided."

I couldn't read anything in his eyes.

"But, with all the highest ranking members of the organization dead except for me....... I suppose it's not entirely inaccurate to say that I'm the head."

He says, still, sword dangling.

"Archdemon, why don't you die here for humanity?"

"You want ...... to die?"

In response, the older man nods.

"I know you love humanity-no, all beings-very, very much."

"And so it is that Epinhauser, who has watched you the longest among us, died for you."

"Because I know you."

"Because I know how much you love me, I had to do it."

"You know that with your death, humanity can accomplish quite a bit."

"Mistrust of each other."

"And simmering despair."

"Even in this situation, where humanity is looking for scapegoats to overcome its despair."

"I'm not saying it will all be overcome, but it will stop this phenomenon of humanity looking for human scapegoats other than demons, driven by an insatiable thirst for revenge."

"But if you die, humanity will have hope."

"Of course, we know there's not much value in hope."

"I realize that nothing can be accomplished with false hope."

"But you can't live without hope."

"You are the epitome of hate and despair."

"Look."

The man points to a crowd of people who, in a panic, are falling on top of each other to their deaths.

"Sadly, your presence is causing despair and fear."

"......."

"No matter what you think of humans, they see nothing but fear and despair in you."

"......."

"When you show up, you panic humans with fear and despair; when you don't, you panic humans with vengeance and hatred."

That very few people understand your intentions.

I couldn't deny it.

I am just a manifestation of hatred, despair, and pain.

I am nothing but a terror to humanity, an enemy that must be destroyed.

Even in the eyes of the beholder.

Even if you can't see it.

I just have a different emotional drive, and I drive people crazy.

"You love humans, but you don't trust them."

"You don't think a misunderstanding so deep that it can't be resolved can be resolved in a beautiful way, otherwise you wouldn't have entered the temple unseen."

"Just as our attempts to deal with the situation on our own terms resulted in this diminished force, you have attempted to deal with this situation on your own terms, and you are here to save those who did not believe in you."

"It's not all wrapped up, but I'm worried about what happens after it's wrapped up."

"There's going to be a war at some point."

"With these wounds unhealed, the humans will insist on slaying the demon at the root of this mess."

"Even if you don't want to, even if the empire doesn't want to, even if the emperor doesn't want to."

"You realize that wars are meant to happen."

"You know people would rather see the death of a demon. than to kill the monsters that roam the continent."

"Today, you tried to save Charlotte de Gradias."

"I think it's a very, very great love and understanding."

"The Devil."

"So, can you please die now?"

"Before more blood is spilled."

"Before more despair and sadness engulfs the world."

"By your death, save the human race."

"Please."

Aside from blocking my path, it was clear that he was admiring my presence.

Regardless of my intentions, I am already a disaster by virtue of my existence.

So, for the sake of humanity, I'm telling you to die on the spot.

I knew there was going to be a war after the Gate debacle.

The Gate Crisis is the original ending.

But after that, there will be war. Wars will be fought because of me.

If I die on the spot, in front of a crowd of humans, there will be no war.

People will rejoice that the devil is dead.

There will be no more scapegoating of the Five High Priests, or any other forces associated with the Devil.

It has nothing to do with my will.

Life generates only despair, fear, and hatred.

Death can save many lives.

So die now, before more sacrifices are made.

He salutes me and tells me to die.

"You, what's your name?"

The older man shook his head at my question.

"I can't tell you. For an ugly being like me would not be worthy to speak the name of a great being like you."

I could tell he had a lot of respect for me beyond his years.

Apart from that, it stands in my way because I have to die.

"It's just that we don't have a black order."

"If good must be done with evil, it is they who do it."

"I'm not going to justify it, because we're not interested in that."

"We do the evil of killing you. We are only trying to do the good of saving humanity."

Is it sophistry.

But I didn't want to point it out too much.

Everyone has a definition they believe in.

That definition is my own sophistry. The man in front of me only stands before me because he lives for it.

"If I die, fewer people will die, that must be true."

Yes, that might be the definition.

That might be the line.

I may have to die.

More can be accomplished in death. There may be more to be accomplished in death.

In the first place, none of this would have happened if I were dead and gone.

As long as the world's malice is directed against me, the more I struggle to do something, the more tragedy and catastrophe will befall me and stand in my way.

However.

"But I want to tell you this."

I tighten my grip on the Alsbringer.

"X."

I.

I want to live.

Alive.

Somehow, I gritted my teeth and survived.

Not a life that you complete by dying.

Instead of dying of discouragement and despair.

"I will live and save."

Must.

Alive.

Not death.

"Whatever it is I'm supposed to be saving."

I'm going to do something with my life.

"Alive."

I don't want to be comfortable in death.

"Alive, with my own eyes, what I have saved. What remains."

I want to live, even if it's on a thorny path of despair.

"Let me see it with my own eyes."

I want to be alive and happy.

Alive.

You can't fix everything that's broken.

Fix the relationships that can be fixed.

I want to be happy.

I know it's foolish and miserable to dream of such a thing, even in this moment, when the world has fallen apart, when so much is broken.

I want to be happy, I definitely think so.

There's nothing wrong with dreaming about it.

No, that could be a mistake.

Maybe it's wrong for a being like me to want that.

Still.

I hope it is.

At my words, the older man looks at me and nods.

"I see."

He pointed his sword at me, and it erupted in a blaze of blue magic.

An unidentifiable black aura swirled in his empty left hand.

"I, for one, will remember you."

As if to remind me for the rest of my life how great I was.

"If I die, will you remember me?"

With those words, the leader of the Black Order points his drawn sword at me.

"That's it, I can do that."

To the first enemy who tries to kill me out of respect, not hatred.

Isn't that the least you can do?

At my words, the older man, whose name I don't recognize, smiles.

"Not the strongest, not the worst, not the worst, but not the worst."

"The best of the best."

"I salute you."

There was no further conversation.

Episode 468.

There is such a thing as common sense.

Something that is universally accepted as true among people.

But common sense is not the truth.

Common sense is sometimes wrong, and there are exceptions.

One of those common sense things.

You will never be able to take on a Master Class at your enchantment level.

As Ellen struggled to keep from being trampled by the crowd, she was watching her assumptions disintegrate in real time.

An imposing auror sword wielded by a mysterious elderly man, while Reinhardt parried with only his Alsbringer.

-Kwaggagang!

Worse, it was overwhelming.

The shockwave from the clash of sword against sword ripped and crushed the earth, and Reinhardt was not so much receiving the Auror sword as he was deflecting and crushing it.

An Auror sword isn't just a sharp sword.

Depending on how the sword's magic is utilized, it can be extremely sharp, or it can deliver a devastating blow with an energized shockwave.

Masterclasses are like using a blunt instrument with a lot of weight.

And things like that, universally, shred the weapon once it hits, as well as the arms and wrists that receive it.

It should be.

No matter how much your physical abilities have been enhanced by enchantments, master classes are more sophisticated and efficient.

So, Reinhardt shouldn't be able to handle a master class.

But Ellen saw that Reinhardt was not being outplayed, but rather was pushing his opponent.

-Kuung! Koo-goo-gung!

The winds of shockwaves from the clash of sword against sword could reach Ellen's face from a distance.

The master class is losing out to someone who can only disenchant.

There's only one reason this shouldn't happen.

Reinhardt is too strong.

You shouldn't be able to force it, it's just snapping and pressing with too much force.

Reinhardt's massive magical enhancement, which appeared to be engulfed in blue flames, showed that Reinhardt's power was beyond measure.

It's less sophisticated and therefore less efficient.

However, it has too much power.

He doesn't have master-level maneuverability, but his base condition is overwhelming, and he pushes his opponents with sheer force, sheer wits, and sheer horsepower.

What to do if Reinhardt becomes dangerous.

I might have to go help Reinhardt, even if it means risking misunderstanding and people's judgment.

That's what I was thinking, but I didn't even need to.

Reinhardt was too strong.

Moreover, Reinhardt's opponent is not just a master class.

-curl!

The mysterious man stretched out his left hand, and black flames erupted from beneath his feet, engulfing Reinhardt.

What Reinhardt was dealing with now was a monster that was both a master class and an archmage.

Amidst the earth-melting flames, Reinhardt emerged unscathed and continued the rough-and-tumble.

Despite the lightning bolts and black flames that shot from the man's hands, and the frigid chill that froze the air, Reinhardt pushed through as if none of it could affect him.

Just as Reinhardt's physical prowess was overwhelming, Ellen could tell that his anti-magical powers were already beyond the killer's level.

The crowd, fleeing from one another, watched in horror.

No one knew who it was that was trying to kill the Demon King, but everyone could tell from a mile away that he was a formidable fighter.

But the devil is stronger.

Moreover, not only the man but also the other raiders continued to attack the demon.

But all the sobriety, magic, and curses they used were having no effect on the demon's body.

The sobriety they had accumulated could not affect the demon's body in any way.

-Curl! Kurrrrr!

But the demon was blowing them up with one look.

A demon of fire, enveloped in blue magic.

It can even ignite an infinitely condensed spark to create a massive explosion.

The crowd could only watch in horror as he slaughtered a group of Swordmasters, Archmages, and Demon Swordsmen in a single bound.

Demon, you're too strong.

"We are....... We're all going to die......."

There were a lot of people who just sat there, immobilized.

Who in the world can take on a demon like that?

Who in the world can hurt the Absolute, who can't be hurt by magic, who can't be hurt by an Auror blade.

It's not the master class, it's the failure to reach it that makes it so terrifying.

I'm still doing that.

What a scourge the devil will be when we get to the master class.

The fear of the demon was even greater for those who saw it, as it was not yet fully grown.

Of course, not all attacks were immune to the demon.

The raiders, some of whom had reached the master class, began their assault. Some even managed to pierce the fiery demon's magical defenses and inflict wounds.

No matter how strong the demon is, it can't easily withstand the onslaught of master classes.

Numerous offensive spells rained down on the demon, and Reinhardt was soon backed into a corner.

-POOF!

"!"

Ellen squinted and watched as the Auror's spear pierced Reinhardt's heart.

The decisive gap.

It didn't miss, and succeeded in inflicting a critical wound.

"Ah, ah, ah. Ah. ah....... Ah, no. No....... No."

Ellen began to shiver and freak out, but the crowd, who were pushing and shoving and fleeing from each other, were wide-eyed.

The demon is dead.

An unnatural silence descended on the chaotic public square.

But.

He holds the spear that pierced his chest with his left hand.

-POOF!

With his heart pierced, he pulled out the spear that had pierced his heart with sheer force.

Then, the devil raises his hand.

-Woof!

In the demon's other hand, which has been holding only the Alsbringer, another sword with a milky white hilt is summoned.

Relic of Tuan, God of Purity.

Tiamata.

-Whoosh!

A holy white light floods Tiamata, and the wound in the demon's chest regenerates.

-Ah....... ah....... aaah.......

Those who had foreseen the demon's death could not help but be horrified by the sight.

-die....... not.......

It's hard to physically break through that massive barrier of magic, and magic rarely works.

Even if somehow pierced, a demon wielding Tuan's divine power will recover from the wound quickly.

-The Devil is Immortal....... The devil is immortal.......

A near-invincible firewall.

A masterclass in mastery.

An overwhelming amount of horsepower released with no end in sight.

And play.

-Nonsense....... nonsense.......

A demon of immeasurable power, whose holy relics allow him to borrow and regenerate the power of the gods at will, and whose sword of war grows stronger the more enemies he faces, and the stronger they are than he is.

Who the hell.

How.

You can kill a demon like that.

That absolute.

That immortal being that can't seem to die.

Who the heck can you play against.

The crowds weren't the only ones tired of the sight of a spear being pulled out of a heart with bare hands.

Reinhard lunges at the frozen, elderly man without giving him a moment's notice.

-Quizik!

Then, with a swift grab of the old man's graying hair, she slammed his head into the floor.

-Thump!

With a fierce crack, Reinhardt slams Alsbringer down, aiming for the head of the man on the ground.

-Bam!

Auror armor was not shattered by the demon's blow.

-Bam!

However, if it doesn't break the first time, you can take a second shot and throw it away.

-Bam!

Three times.

-Bang!

Four times.

-Bang!

Five times.

-Quack!

Six times.

-Quizik!

Then, on the seventh, the sound of something breaking echoed coldly through the great hall.

I crushed the Auror-armored master class with my might.

We didn't stab them to death, we smashed them to death.

Their leader was killed before they had a chance to react.

Literally, crushed to death.

Archmage and master class.

Head of the Black Order.

He was slain by the demon in a futile and senseless manner.

Still exuding the same momentum as at the beginning, the Demon King looked at the Master Classes that had been conspiring against him.

Those who have stood in the demon's way so far begin to slowly retreat.

As if this didn't kill the devil, and now it's just a dog's death.

People despair as they watch the raiders begin to flee.

We don't know who they are.

A group of very strong players attacked the demon.

However, it failed.

Only that simple truth will stick in people's minds.

In the middle of the ecliptic.

That's where this happened.

Who could possibly take on an immortal demon?

-Run away, run away, run away!

After holding out hope and dwelling on the thought that the demon might be dead, they begin to run in panic once more as the raiders flee.

"Get out of the way! Get out of the way! Get out of the way!"

Countless people passing by Ellen tapped her on the shoulder, shoved her, and screamed for her life as she stood there dazed.

-Puck!

And just like that, Ellen, staring blankly at Reinhardt, was knocked off her feet by the shoulders of the fleeing men.

With that, the deep hood that Ellen had been wearing came off.

"ah......."

"Uh......."

People running away see it.

She looks at Ellen's face and freezes, as if frozen.

In the ecliptic, there are few who don't recognize Ellen's face.

Although few people saw her in person, Ellen's face was familiar through portraits and propaganda.

"Warrior......?"

People stop to look at Ellen, who is frozen in place.

Suddenly, Ellen was struck by an ominous premonition.

"A warrior!"

Someone shouted.

-Sir?

-Ellen is here?!

-Sir?

-Mercenary.......

Ellen felt her blood run cold.

My fingertips trembled, my lips quivered.

-The warrior has come to save us!

The cheers were getting louder.

Through the crowd, through the roar.

Ellen saw Reinhardt standing in the distance, looking at her.

"Hero, please, please, please defeat the demon!"

One of the fleeing men cries and pleads with Ellen.

The looks on everyone else's faces were no different.

A warrior would be different, or so we like to believe.

"I, I, I....... I, I am....... I am......."

I.

I.

What the hell.

How?

Why?

It was as if her brain had failed her, and she couldn't think of anything or draw any conclusions.

People help Ellen up from her fall.

The fleeing people turn to Ellen and beg her to defeat the demon.

Some pray while crying, others stand still and tremble.

Please defeat the devil.

Ellen is pushed into the square by the crowd.

Reinhardt stood still, staring at Ellen Artorius as she was pushed through the crowd.

They don't know what to do, but they want you to do something.

He pushes Ellen away from the slaughtering demon, and the people flee.

However, there were those who watched from afar, hoping to catch a glimpse of the spectacle somehow.

Demons and heroes.

The distance between them was great.

Reinhardt stared at Ellen in silence.

Ellen shuddered, her complexion turning white.

Why.

Why on earth would you do this.

Why you should reunite in this situation.

Reinhardt's face was expressionless.

Why.

With that look.

With a completely emotionless expression.

Why are you looking at me like that.

"I, I....... La, Reinhard....... I am......."

I don't want to fight.

I don't want to fight with you.

Killing too.

Dying.

Reject.

Ellen swallows the words, her lips trembling.

Reinhard walks over to Ellen, who is trembling.

Toward Ellen, who summoned neither Rafelt nor Lament.

"It's ......."

Reinhardt leaps up, turns to Ellen, and says, "Nazik.

"spirit......."

"......!"

"Don't you want to go?"

-Bam!

"Hmph......!"

Into Ellen's abdomen, Reinhardt's fist went.

-Quack!

With a single blow to the abdomen, Ellen was sent flying across the great plaza to a building, where she was slammed against the wall.

Reinhardt walks slowly toward Ellen Artorius, who is pinned against the wall of the building, ignoring the crowd's gasps of horror.

"ugh....... ugh...... ugh....... ugh......."

I was caught unprepared.

"Kwak! Kwak! Kulk! Kek!"

I managed to activate my Auror armor just in time to avoid being hit, but Ellen coughed up a stream of blood.

"Ah....... Ugh......."

You probably didn't mean to kill it.

But it was in hands that were never meant to be gentle.

Ellen looks up in fear at the approaching Reinhardt.

Than the gut-wrenching pain.

Than the pain of coughing up blood.

Seeing Reinhardt's emotionless face was Ellen's greatest fear right now.

That stare, like an enemy's, was Ellen's greatest fear.

"ugh....... ugh....... Hmph......."

"What would happen if people knew that a warrior was afraid to fight a demon?"

Reinhardt approaches, his face emotionless.

"What I could never do, you can do."

To be a symbol of hope.

That's impossible for the devil.

Only Warriors.

Only a warrior can be a symbol of hope.

Therefore, a warrior who falters in the face of the devil will only bring despair to all.

In their despair, they can only envision a future where humanity is destroyed by the devil, and a world without hope is doomed to collapse.

So you have to fight.

You have to fight for it.

Even if it's a false hope, it has to be there.

Even if it's a false hope, people need to believe in it so they can somehow attach themselves to reality.

It's okay to have demons because we have heroes.

One day, a hero will defeat the devil.

Because people need to believe that to keep this world on the brink of collapse.

"So pay attention."

The demon looks down at the warrior in fear and terror.

"Wake up. Unless you want to die."

Demon.

Valerie raises her foot toward Ellen.

-Bang!

The building began to crumble as the enchanted demon's foot slammed down where Ellen's head had been.

Ellen quickly rolls to the side and looks at Reinhardt.

Ellen's eyes were filled with terror, despair, and fear.

Why I.

Why you.

"I am...... Reinhard....... Reinhard I am......."

"Shut up."

Valier looks at Ellen with a cold stare.

"Me, don't call me that."

This is not the time for a touching reunion.

Too many people are watching.

I know that's why I'm doing this.

Ellen sees Reinhardt staring at her in fear and horror, the same way he stares at his enemies.

Ellen realizes.

I.

I can't.

You can take Charlotte with you, but.

That I am the hope of humanity, and they will never take me away.

He knows that people are projecting their hopes onto him, and he would never take himself for their hopes.

That harsh reality and truth.

Ellen couldn't help but notice the look in Reinhardt's eyes.

I felt like I was about to burst into tears.

But I couldn't cry.

A warrior who faces a demon should not cry in the face of a demon.

Never, ever, ever.

A solemn-looking demon approaches.

"You, do what you have to do."

"......."

"I'll do my thing."

I wanted to sit down.

I wanted to collapse and cry.

Rather, I wanted to die.

But people were turning their heads and watching the confrontation and walking away.

Ellen staggers to her feet.

And, while still looking horrified.

It was a hard pill to swallow.

Just as Reinhard had to carry something, Ellen has to carry something.

They can't escape the shackles of hero and devil.

So, the devil may take the hated maiden, but he never takes the hero.

Now, no matter what, we can't be together.

In Ellen's hand was the Sword of the Moon.

The Cloak of the Sun is draped over Ellen's shoulders.

With shaky eyes, the warrior stares at the demon.

Reinhardt.

No.

Demon, go to Bali.

The warrior, Ellen Artorius, approaches.

Episode 469.

The tip of Ellen's sword shook as she faced the demon.

His eyes, body, and legs were shaking.

-Kang! Card draw!

In the Demon's onslaught, Ellen was only able to retreat in an awkward position, unable to land a single offensive strike.

The devil was unforgiving.

The fierce blast of magical energy broke through Rafelt's semi-elasticity and slammed into the auror armor that encased Ellen.

-Bam!

"Ahhhhhhh!"

Hit in the stomach by a heavily weighted kick, Ellen bounced away and rolled unceremoniously on the floor.

Pain.

That in itself wasn't a big deal.

However, I felt like my heart was breaking.

He knows this fight is nothing more than theater. Reinhard would not kill him, and he would never want to hurt him.

It was necessary to show people that a warrior could stand up to a demon.

I wouldn't have known if I hadn't bumped into it, but I did.

Demons are scary, but people need to believe that a warrior can take them on.

That way, when people despair and curse the world, they'll still grit their teeth and try to live with the hope and expectation that one day the devil will die.

For those who hate the devil, they'll do anything to live to hear the story that one day the devil was slain by a warrior.

So even if you don't want to fight, you have to fight somehow.

The demon bounces off and leaps toward Ellen, who rolls on the ground.

And.

-Thump!

A massive, energized slam, crushing the earth where Ellen had just stood.

Ellen had already rolled out of the way.

Somehow he managed to keep his sword pointed at the demon, but the tip of it was shaking violently.

This situation said it all.

The look on Reinhardt's face said it all.

Now.

That things will never be the same again.

Walking hand in hand.

Hug or.

Like whispering to each other that you're important to each other, and sharing those things.

Can't be.

The hope of humanity.

Enemies of humanity.

It's just a relationship that's divided into such a cruel dichotomy.

So Reinhardt attacks Ellen regardless of his true intentions.

Technically, they fight to lose. The devil needs to be defeated by the warrior here and now so that the people have hope.

But Ellen couldn't swing the ramen.

A moon sword that responds to grief.

The power of the Voidblade Ramen was best understood by its user, Ellen.

The Voidblade is an absolute blade that cuts through anything. Even an auror-sheathed swordmaster's blade will slice through the hardest monster flesh with ease.

We do not know if Voidblades can cut through holy items.

However, if you swing it wrong, you could cut Reinhardt to pieces along with the holy relic.

That's why Ellen can't swing her sword around.

Reinhardt might get hurt.

Or maybe Reinhardt will die.

The demon stares at the warrior as he slowly retreats backwards, trembling and helpless.

"Scary, you."

The demon moves slowly toward the warrior.

"You're scared I'm going to die, aren't you?"

"......."

"You are......."

Ellen was tempted to bite her tongue when she realized that the demon had read her thoughts so clearly.

"I."

The demon points the Tiamata in his left hand at Ellen, not at Alsbringer.

"Still."

-Woof!

White halos begin to ripple across the Tiamata in the demon's hands.

"I had a lot to say to you......."

Something is coming.

Whatever it is, Ellen has activated auras all over her body.

Despite the distance, the torrent of divine power swirling through Tiamata was very ominous.

"Do I look like the asshole I was then?"

With this in mind, the demon struck him down in a fit of rage.

The demon unleashes a Tiamata at Ellen from a distance that the sword cannot reach.

-Flash!

Light storm.

Along with the thought of a storm of light that seems to be blinding you.

Ellen felt a powerful destructive force coursing through her body, like it was going to tear her apart.

\* \* \*

-Kurrrrrr

The release of divine power that energizes the force itself, without the intent of the force.

A jet of power ripped through the great plaza, and Ellen barely managed to climb out of the crumbling building.

"Hmph....... ugh......."

Thanks to the protection of my lapel and my Auror armor, I was not seriously wounded.

However, without that protection, Ellen would have been killed by the attack.

The demon bounced a hundred meters away and stared at Ellen as she rose from the rubble of the building.

Right now, Ellen could clearly sense that the demon was furious.

Is he angry because he feels like he's being ignored?

It's not.

Just because you're important.

I don't want to point a sword at you.

Ellen wanted to scream.

But.

It really isn't.

I might get hurt.

How is saying you can't give it your all because you might die any different than ignoring Reinhardt, after all.

The reason he's not confident enough to make this play is because he's afraid Reinhardt won't be able to catch his attack.

That's why Reinhardt is furious.

I still think I'm the same kid.

Do you still think I'm that guy because I'm always right?

Ellen gritted her teeth.

Reinhardt is not the Reinhardt he used to be.

I didn't open the door to the master class, but I became a monster who could take on the master class without opening it.

I've always been ahead of Reinhardt, so it makes sense that I'm ahead of him now.

You can't say that you didn't have that feeling.

Ellen recognizes her arrogance.

Reinhardt became stronger.

Maybe even more than yourself.

Ellen holds the ramen with both hands.

Now we need to play.

You have to show people a play where you defeat a demon after a hard-fought battle.

The difference.

One mistake, and they're forced to make risky plays that could kill each other.

If you think about it, that's not hard to do.

Did I really need to be this nervous, scared, and panicked?

It's still heartbreaking and painful, but Ellen has to admit it.

It's not hard to do.

If you think about it.

We've crossed swords countless times.

Until it's past your bedtime each day.

At first, Reinhardt was barely worth fighting, barely able to walk. Then Reinhard taught him swordsmanship.

At some point, I got to the point where I could take it a little easier.

Every day like that.

I crossed swords every day.

At some point, Reinhardt got so good that I had to play against him.

So Ellen's breathing became labored until she was out of breath.

Daily.

Every moment.

They've been relentlessly pitted against each other.

As such, they know each other's swords better than anyone else in the world.

That's why it's easy.

It should be easy.

Ellen holds still and points the Voidblade she holds in both hands at the demon.

The trepidation was gone.

\* \* \*

Fortunately or unfortunately, the Voidblade was unable to ring the holy relic.

A blade that could cut through anything could not cut through a holy object.

But all other defenses were defeated.

Demons could parry Voidblade Ramen, but only if they were blocked by a holy object. It could not block attacks directed at its body.

No matter how powerful your enchantments are, or even if you have access to Auror armor.

In front of the Voidblade, it was a piece of paper.

-Kang! Card gain!

The people could see that the warrior who had been trembling in fear, unable to do this or that, once he began to attack, he was unrelenting in his pursuit of the demon.

I don't know why I was freaking out, but now was the time.

Apparently, the Demon that had withstood the onslaught of the other Master Classes was now only concerned with blocking attacks against the Champion from a certain point onward.

In this fight, however, no one realized that Ellen was deliberately avoiding dealing a fatal blow to the demon, and that the demon was deliberately acting desperate to retreat.

Reinhardt's swordsmanship is essentially Ellen's, and Ellen's swordsmanship is essentially that of the warrior Lagan Artorius.

As such, it was inevitable that Ellen would know everything about Reinhardt's swordsmanship, and because of the difference in actual talent and aptitude, Reinhardt's swordsmanship would be an inferior version of Ellen's.

Demons fight by exchanging holy objects.

Use Alsbringer, then recall it, and summon Tiamata to fight if necessary.

When necessary, she summoned holy objects in each hand and wielded them like twin swords, but as far as Ellen could see, it was a matter of trusting her physical abilities, not finesse.

Reinhardt's swordsmanship was basically fighting with a single sword. Ellen's swordsmanship hadn't changed.

I had no one to teach me the unusual art of dual-wielding, and I wasn't about to abandon the foundation I'd already laid for dual-wielding just because I had two holy relics to get good at.

Therefore, the Devil's Sword was still readable by Ellen.

Of course.

"Maybe it's fighting to be read.

This is just theater for show.

So maybe he's intentionally attacking Ellen to make it easier for her to read, and she'll take it.

They crossed swords for an excruciatingly long time.

So it made sense that Reinhard could read Ellen's sword, just as Ellen could read Reinhard's sword.

Of course, just because it's theater doesn't mean it's all sword and sorcery.

-Bam!

"Ugh......black!"

When he sees an opening, he'll actually try to hit Ellen over the head with his sword, or stab her in the back.

-Bam! Quack!

Ellen deflected Reinhardt's sword with her lambent, then dealt the demon a physical blow with a left fist or kick.

It was a rough-and-tumble affair that no one would consider theater.

The scale of the fight is different than it used to be in the temple, when I didn't have access to enchantments.

It was a nasty, nasty fight, with fountains shattering, earth being crushed, and a few buildings falling apart as they were blown away.

No one else was allowed to interfere in the battle between the warrior and the demon.

Not the crowds, but the knights and wizards of the Empire, who watched the spectacle with bated breath, fearing it would be distracting.

It was a play, but to those who didn't know it was a play, it looked like a demon and a hero fighting for their lives.

And, yes, they were indeed risking their lives.

It's a situation where if one side makes a mistake, the other side dies.

No demons, no warriors.

They were at each other's throats, pointing swords at each other.

The great plaza for the execution of the Empress had been turned into a ruin by the fight between the demon and the warrior.

Until when.

Do we have to show people how we hurt each other?

Biting her lip until she could taste blood, Ellen thought to herself as she lunged at the demon.

Aim the ramen at Reinhardt's heart.

Now that he has shown this sword path, Reinhardt will attack with his left fist, a kick, or a twisting elbow as he parries the ramen with his Alsbringer.

If he did, he would block the attack with his Auror armor and set up a follow-up.

This attack is possible because they are reading each other.

Just like that.

That moment when you extend your sword, trusting that it will deflect the thrust.

Reinhardt doesn't deflect the Alsbringer, but rather stabs it toward Ellen.

-POOF!

-Kang!

"!!!!"

Ellen's eyes widened as she watched her sword pierce Reinhardt's chest like a lie.

Naturally, the Alsbringer aimed for Ellen's chest in her Auror armor, and she was forced to deflect it.

Intentionally allowed an attack.

Ellen's face went white, never thinking she would allow this attack.

"¯....... 으......."

The demon takes a few steps, then backs away.

Slowly backing away from Ellen, who is so startled that she loses her grip on the sword, the demon pulls out the ramen that has been stabbed into his heart.

-Bang!

The ramen drops to the floor in a heap, and Reinhardt slowly backs away.

"Me, me....... me......."

Reinhard glares at Ellen, who is about to say something.

As in, don't say anything.

As if we haven't already seen how Tiamata can heal wounds.

The demon who speaks only with his eyes retreats, clutching his pierced chest.

The demon raises one hand to the sky.

As if that's a sign,

A crack in the air reveals someone.

Ellen's eyes widened at the sudden appearance.

Herriot de Saint-Ouen.

Herriot, tearing through space, grabs the staggering Reinhardt.

Herriot and Ellen's eyes meet for a moment.

No Harriet, no Ellen.

There's a lot we want to say to each other, but we know we shouldn't say anything.

Ellen could only watch, dumbfounded, as Herriot escaped the wounded demon with a quick spatial shift.

Silence permeated the great square.

Most of them have fled the scene of the battle between the hero and the demon.

But there were definitely people watching.

The warrior, who at first seemed to be terrified, then, as if he had made up his mind, began to take on the demon, pushing him harder and harder until he finally mortally wounded him.

As the demon recovered from his wounds, he chose to flee rather than fight further.

It obviously felt threatened and ran away.

In other words, the devil is not immortal.

-Ma....... Demon.......

-The king has fled.......

-You made the devil run....... He made the devil flee.......

We all know the devil isn't dead.

I know that the healing power will restore him.

But in any case, the demon decided he couldn't take on the warrior and fled with his minions.

-The king has fled!

-The warrior chased the demon awayAhhhh!

A few people who had the audacity to watch the bloody battle from afar in the great square began to shout.

Reinhardt was getting the picture he wanted.

I painted a picture of a near-immortal demon in the middle of the ecliptic suffering defeat at the hands of Ellen Artorius, and so it was.

He made everyone see that a warrior could stand up to a demon, just as they hoped.

But it was the feel of the sword as it plunged into Reinhardt's heart that terrified Ellen.

Many civilians were dying, they were unable to execute the princess, and the devil himself appeared.

But such a demon was driven out by the hand of a warrior.

I couldn't kill it, but I might be able to.

Ellen was shaking with fear.

-You have defeated the demon!

People were praising the warrior.

The deeper the despair, the greater the hope.

But the more people projected hope onto themselves, the more Ellen felt her own despair grow.

Episode 470.

Southern Ecliptic Gradient, entrance to Krinto Forest.

Everyone, including me, was gathered at the pre-arranged rally point.

-Woof

"Are you okay?"

"Not great, but whatever. It's about as good as it gets......."

Harriet asked carefully, wiping the blood from the corner of my mouth.

"Still, getting your heart pierced twice in one day can't be good for you."

It hurt to look back.

The first time I was impaled by a window was unexpected, but the second time I was pierced through the heart by lement was intentional.

I swear.

It's scarier and more painful to know and be stabbed.

Though he is now healed by Tiamata's divine power, the memory of the pain is not easily forgotten.

Among other things.

The look of shock on Ellen's face as she stabbed me stuck in my mind.

It must be traumatizing.

Not only did it sting me, but I couldn't help but feel bad for Ellen, knowing that today's experience was going to make her feel like hell.

I had an idea that Ellen might be there, but I didn't expect the crowd to push her around and force her to fight.

Herriot disarmed the spatial travel shield and pulled me out just in time for the signal.

The leader of the Black Order is dead, and the remnants have retreated.

I'm not sure what they're going to try to do to me again.

The area around the Ecliptic was periodically cleared of monsters by the Templars, so the monsters of the Gate were not nearby. Of course, even that was not foolproof, and monsters would occasionally appear in the Ecliptic Refuge.

For now, there were no monsters in sight near this forest.

Despite a number of unexpected events, I was able to accomplish my goal in the end.

We succeeded in rescuing Sarkegar, Lucinil, and Charlotte.

I had to be unintentionally harsh on Ellen.

It was inevitable.

I think so.

I let Charlotte sleep at first.

But for now, it was up.

Charlotte was frozen, not knowing what had happened to her.

Charlotte has black hair and red eyes.

I wonder if I'll never be able to get back to my original state.

"Degraded......."

Sarkegar looks at me, his voice trembling.

"I'm sorry. I left it too late. Me too. I had so many things to do....... No, never mind. I'm sorry. I was too late."

"No, Zhai, just seeing you like this, unharmed, is enough to make me....... God is....... God is......."

I held Sarkegar still as he sobbed in agony.

Dreadfind's true colors make him look a little scary, but whatever.

I am grateful that Sarkegar is safe.

After that hug, I held Lucinil still as well.

"Sorry, my lord. I'm late......."

Lucinil smirked and pulled me to face him.

"No, not really. Because of your warning, me and this gentleman got along pretty well. We were treated like royalty. Even at the execution today, we were told what to expect."

Lucinil hugged my neck and patted me on the back.

Finally, I stood in front of a frozen Charlotte.

"Uh......."

Where to start.

Just as Charlotte was frozen, I was at a loss for words.

"I just thought I'd do this for now......."

"......."

In front of Charlotte, who had no idea what was going on, I finally sighed.

"You're supposed to come with me from now on....... Um....... First of all, I'm sorry about everything."

Charlotte's lips quivered as she watched me apologize.

"I don't know if you'll still hate me, but....... I couldn't leave you alone."

We don't know what Charlotte is thinking.

But I definitely told a lot of lies, and I definitely deceived Charlotte.

Even Charlotte's mother, her nemesis, Sarkeghar, is standing next to her now.

You may never forgive me.

I don't know what Charlotte did wrong to me. But Charlotte looked at me and gaped.

-Hair

Then, as if broken, Charlotte suddenly fell to her knees.

Then, he bowed his head.

Kneeling in front of me, clutching my head in a way that would drive it into the ground.

"ugh....... ugh....... ugh....... ugh. Ew! Ew!"

Charlotte cried, screaming.

"No, no, why are you crying....... Why......."

I wonder if he was sorry for me.

Like I feel sorry for everyone.

Maybe Charlotte had been feeling guilty about me all along.

Me, Ellen, and Charlotte.

We asked why.

I wonder if we're just making each other feel guilty.

Why do we get stuck in the mindset that everything is our fault?

"Ew! Black! Ew! Ew! Ew! Ew! Ew! Ew...... Ew......."

Sorry and guilt.

Charlotte lets out a guttural, animalistic cry because of it.

"ugh, ugh....... Ugh....... Sorry...... ah. Me, sorry. Sorry....... I'm sorry....... Okay, well....... Wrong....... I'm sorry......."

I knelt down in front of Charlotte, who was crying with her head in her hands.

"Me too, I've done a lot wrong."

"Oh, no, no, no, I, I....... I didn't believe you! I, it's all because of me....... All, all, all because of me....... Because of me......."

As Charlotte cried for a long time, like a small animal, I could only watch and pat her on the back.

\* \* \*

Rusinil, Sarkegar, and Charlotte.

I succeeded in getting them all back to the Edina Archipelago.

Rusinil and Sarkegar were not persecuted or tortured for their warnings.

Nothing happened.

The Black Order attacked me, I killed their leader, and I even had to fight Ellen, who was there.

A number of civilian casualties have occurred.

But in the end, I succeeded in getting the three I was aiming for safely.

Charlotte wasn't hating me, she was feeling guilty.

Who was responsible for all of this?

I feel like it was inevitable that the gate incident would happen because of the intertwining of our feelings and my lies.

Everyone seemed to think it was their responsibility.

Royalty of Razak.

I felt the need to be alone with Charlotte for a while.

By all appearances, Charlotte was overly emaciated and not in good shape.

Charlotte, who had stopped crying in fits, hung her head low.

Even making eye contact with me seemed to make him feel guilty.

"It's all in the past."

"......."

"Let's just end it with each other doing the other wrong, all of it."

"......."

But those words couldn't erase the guilt Charlotte felt for me.

"I'm....... You can't do that. I....... You don't deserve this help....... Not even a little....... I don't deserve this....... Don't help me....... I betrayed you. I didn't trust you, I didn't believe you....... I didn't try to understand......."

Just like you'd rather be killed by a monster on the street or in the wilderness.

"People died because of me....... All of them....... It's because of me......."

Charlotte's guilt had gone beyond self-pity to self-blame.

I grabbed Charlotte by both cheeks, forcing her to look me in the eye as she hung her head and repeated her self-deprecating words.

The evil-eyed Charlotte, unable to meet my gaze, lowered her eyes, and then closed them altogether.

"Remember what I told you once upon a time?"

"......."

"If you do this, who am I?"

If you have the soul of a demon in your body, you might as well be dead.

When I said that, I turned to Charlotte and said, with a hint of regret.

How would I feel if you didn't value your life and kept repeating these self-deprecating thoughts?

"If you do this, then what have I done, risking my life to get you out of the Demon Castle, killing my father's soul and allowing you to keep your own self? I had to fight the Black Order and Ellen to bring you here, and if you say....... I, who brought you this far....... become."

"......."

At that, Charlotte struggles to open her eyes and looks at me.

His eyes filled with tears.

The tears, including those of guilt, were painful to watch.

"Live for me. If you're sorry, work for me as much as you're sorry."

"......?"

"Yeah, well, to be honest, I brought you here more to save your life than to....... Uh......."

I'd rather do it this way.

I feel like I can't allow myself to be with him because of the guilt and the sense of guilt.

You don't seem to be able to tolerate being in such a cozy environment.

"I brought him here to work."

Like Elise destroying the warp gate to relieve her guilt and guilt feelings. Just like she puts thinking about guilt and guiltiness on the back burner while she desperately tries to do something.

Let's make Charlotte feel like she has to do something, that she can do something.

And I actually brought her here because I needed her.

"You have a lot of work to do."

"What did I......?"

"Anyway, if you feel sorry for me, if you feel guilty for people, work. Work to pay me back."

I'll take the debt.

You've saved my life three times, and now you're going to settle the debt.

If those words can give Charlotte a little more willpower now, I'd rather they did.

"I look like....... I look like this....... How can I....... can I do anything......."

Despite the situation, I found it a bit amusing to see what he could do in the form of the devil.

"No, it's great."

I run a hand through Charlotte's graying hair.

I probably shouldn't say this.

"That's a better visual than me."

"......?"

Honestly, Charlotte looks more like a demon than I do.

No writer would ever ask a devil surrogate looking like this to cover up for breaking a plate or cup.

I squeezed Charlotte's cheeks roughly when I told her that I hadn't saved her, but brought her to work.

"......!"

"So from now on, eat better, take care of yourself. Exercise. Okay?"

"......."

"I have to if I want to do my job properly. Don't you think?"

Charlotte looks up at me, her cheeks pinched.

"Answer me quickly."

When I release my hand on her cheek, Charlotte hangs her head in a daze.

"......Yes."

Charlotte cried again because she knew why I was saying this.

I told him I'd get mad if he kept crying, and he was holding his breath and grunting to keep from crying, and then I thought he'd pass out.

I couldn't help but pat him on the back.